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PLAY



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REVIEWS
INSIDE

ISSUE 18
OCTOBER 2022
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How COD levels up shooters

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→ INTERVIEW

SKULL & BONES

Why you should set sail for PS5's pirate adventure

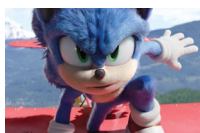
ALIENS' MUCH-NEEDED RETURN TO SURVIVAL HORROR

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Welcome



Greetings, PLAYer. **Call Of Duty cover features have come to plenty of gaming mags over the years, but this is the first time on PLAY. We couldn't help ourselves, as this new-flavour Modern**

Warfare II is one of the most exciting and important releases in the series to date. Especially for single-player lovers.

Fortunately, Infinity Ward is on hand to sit down with us to discuss it all (p48). Captain Price and Task Force 141 star in one of the most ambitious FPS campaigns we've ever seen, and it seems to be setting a new pace for the series and the genre as a whole, with some prime multiplayer offerings to match. Let's hope it can stick the landing as we need some single-player wins for the series.

Games aren't the only things that have grown more ambitious over time either – movies based on games have too. We take a

“CAPTAIN PRICE AND TASK FORCE 141 STAR IN AN AMBITIOUS FPS CAMPAIGN.”

look at the history of big-screen adaptations (p58), for better and worse. But between the likes of Uncharted and Sonic The Hedgehog 2, it feels like we've finally turned a corner.

Skull And Bones (p6) has re-emerged after we last saw it many moons ago, adrift at an E3. Ubisoft throwing its weight behind another online game isn't shocking, but this game's style is a bit more surprising. It promises to be an immersive pirate-'em-up that you can get lost in rather than being twitchy all the time, which is a nice change of pace. Creative director Elisabeth Pellen chats with us to explain how it came to be.

PlayStation itself still has plenty up its sleeve to excite PS5 owners. New updates have been rolling out to the beta programme to assist in organisation and provide the long-awaited 1440p resolution (p15), and yet another PSVR2 update reveals more about how the headset camera will function (p10). This summer shows no signs of slowing down, so we hope you enjoy reading this packed issue as much as we did making it!



Oscar Taylor-Kent
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GAME OF THE MONTH
MultiVersus
BEST MASK
Ghost (Call Of Duty)

THIS MONTH'S TASK FORCE 141



Dashiell Wood
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Bravo Six, going *light*. Dash steps out of the shadows with a mission to blow open the doors of the latest COD.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Klonoa
BEST MASK
Jacket (Hotline Miami)



Jess Kinghorn
GAMES EDITOR

Since Stray, she's blocked out the team's shared calendar with scheduled catnaps, and pushes boxes of mags off desks.

GAME OF THE MONTH
Stray
BEST MASK
Mileena (Mortal Kombat)



Miriam McDonald
OPERATIONS EDITOR

Skull And Bones has the team in a shantying mood, but Mim's question remains unanswered: 'How's the grog on board?'

GAME OF THE MONTH
Stray
BEST MASK
Corvo (Dishonored)



Milford Coppock
MANAGING ART EDITOR

We've had the new Sonic movie on loop in the office. Somehow, Milf still hasn't warmed to the series. Can't fathom why!

GAME OF THE MONTH
Stray
BEST MASK
Psycho Mantis (MGS1)

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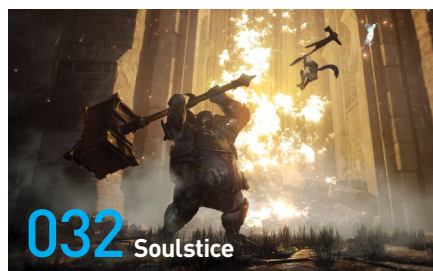
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Insider

Getting you closer to PlayStation's most exciting stories, people, and culture

■ Rather than banding together with others, you captain your own vessel. ■

Every player is the captain of their own ship, and can either band together with others or fight for the biggest scores of loot.

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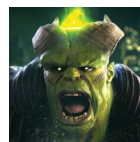
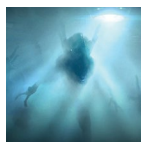
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Skate goes free-to-play



Skull And Bones prepares to set sail

The game's creative director Elisabeth Pellen looks back on the journey so far

Pirates are about to have a big moment. This year has seen the success of TV series *Our Flag Means Death*, and the long-running manga *One Piece* is staring down its final story arc. On top of all that, people are still yelling from the crow's nest about how fantastic *Black Sails* was. As such, it's no surprise to see Ubisoft riding that wave, with *Skull And Bones* coming to PS5 on 8 November.

As hot as pirates are right now, the fires of this project's story were first lit all the way back in 2013. Assassin's Creed IV: *Black Flag* had been released to widespread acclaim, and Ubisoft sought to capitalise on that success. Beginning development as an Assassin's Creed expansion before becoming an online multiplayer experience, *Skull And Bones* is now very much its own thing.

Creative director Elisabeth Pellen talks us through part of that journey, explaining, "After E3 2018, [...] we saw an opportunity to give more space to the player for more interesting combat manoeuvres with these gigantic ships, so we pivoted towards creating a multiplayer naval combat game in an immersive open world."

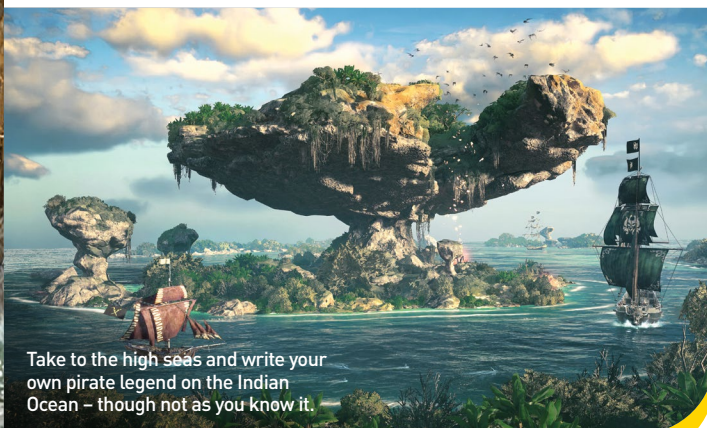
Rather than banding together with other players on deck, you captain your own

vessel and crew from the jump. From there you can team up with other player captains, go your own way in seeking out booty, or snatch up someone else's treasure in PvP combat.

Pellen adds, "Players can easily switch to a PvE-only [server], with no loss in progression depending on the session they would want to have on that day."

Whether you're taking on convoys, rich NPC merchants, or other players, naval combat is all about getting your ship into position and making the most of your onboard weapons. Once you've sunk the opposition, you've then got to find a way to extract your booty, and haul it back to port – hopefully without scattering it along the ocean floor. There are specialised cargo ships for this, and that's one reason banding together with other players and

Once you've sunk the opposition, you've got to find a way to extract your booty.

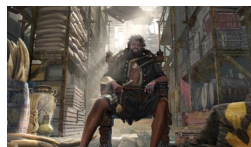


Take to the high seas and write your own pirate legend on the Indian Ocean – though not as you know it.

making the most of each vessel type's unique abilities is worth considering.

LAND AHOY!

Besides shifting gameplay gears, the project also swapped scenery more than once before setting sail on the Indian Ocean. Pellen explains that, after no small amount of historical research, this was the obvious choice: "The Indian Ocean during the Second Golden Age Of Piracy was considered the most dangerous sea. It was like an Eldorado for young pirates to become billionaires in one day with the right knowledge and attitude. Instead of



ALL THAT GLITTERS

Does 'X' mark the spot in Skull And Bones? We have to ask, and Elisabeth Pellen confirms: "Yes – players will be able to find treasure maps within the world with clues to finding cargo stashes. We'll explain more in the coming months."

spending their spoils, some invested their gold in outposts and smuggling routes to build their own secret trading networks.

"The pirates of the Indian Ocean were also more diverse – some became experts in scavenging wrecks, while others became hunters and buccaneers selling illegal goods, or even logwood cutters when they were not out at sea. They were some of the deadliest [in] pirate history, because they would organise gangs to raid fortresses [...] The Indian Ocean was an endless source of inspiration."

The team did take some liberties with history. "We took inspiration from what was real for the grittiness and flavour [...] but we did not [restrict] ourselves to the historical events," Pellen shares. "For instance, we have torpedoes in the game to provide more depth to our naval combat."

Speaking of tall tales, there's no standard story campaign to follow, with the narrative focus instead on giving you

the space to soak in the world's details and write your own legend in its waves.

"You might get a different experience depending on when you visit [a particular outpost]," Pellen elaborates, "and this encourages players to interact with one another, and share information [...] We don't have one story but multiple stories that will evolve over time."

MOST WANTED

'Opportunistic rover to kingpin' (pirate royalty) is the journey central to Skull And Bones. Notoriety fuelled much of the real-world pirates' power, and you'll find a mechanical expression of that here.

Pellen explains, "Game director Ryan Barnard [was inspired to] create a system of progression based on the ability to score the biggest heist, and gain more resources to build your reputation. The Infamy system is elastic. Players gain [and] lose some points based on the risk and reward. At a

higher level, you become a middleman and eventually [...] an entrepreneur where you can craft your own contraband for the most influential brokers in the world."

But not everyone loves a girlboss pirate, least of all your crew if you don't keep them happy. "We wanted the deck of our own ship to behave like a living theatre which changes depending on your actions," Pellen says. "We also wanted it to have an impact on your gameplay, so we developed a morale gauge that will go down if [for instance] you don't feed your crew. At the other extreme, if you manage to galvanise your crew, the more enthusiastic your crew will be."

If you neglect your crew they could even force you off your ship. Pellen says, "If your crew does mutiny against you, you will be marooned on an island with a basic ship. When you manage to head back to [dry land], the pirates waiting on the dock are aware of the mutiny, and will jeer at you."

But this isn't the end – it's a new beginning as you start climbing the rigging towards kingpin status once more. Pass the grog, we're diving back in!

★ The champagne will smash on Skull And Bones' hull on 8 November.

1 The Indian Ocean during the Second Golden Age Of Piracy was considered the most dangerous sea. 2



Everyone's gotta start somewhere. There's a wealth of ships to upgrade and customise, from the humble sailing sloop to specialised warships.



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2



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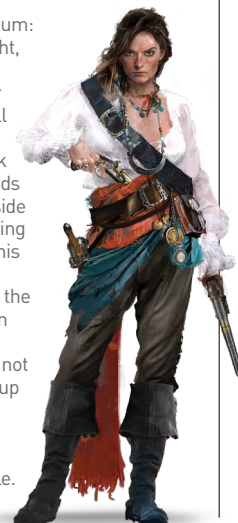


4



5

1 Get chummy or become chum: if you don't treat your crew right, they'll mutiny and you'll be on your own. **2** There's no linear story campaign but there's still plenty to discover across the ocean. **3** It's important to look the part with snazzy figureheads but don't skimp on your hull-side defences! Hopefully, an opposing vessel will get the point with this armour. **4** What's a legend without a lead? You can adjust the look of both your pirate captain and their crew. **5** This heist would be a challenge solo but not impossible! Even so, teaming up with buddies makes things easier, especially when each captain's ship brings its own specialised abilities to the table.





COMING SOON

PSVR2's library is already taking shape – in somewhat terrifying fashion, we have to say. VR content has been confirmed for a handful of upcoming PlayStation games, including the highly anticipated Resident Evil 4 remake.



Wood ya believe it?

Dashiell Wood's hot gossip

Rumours regarding the next big industry acquisition are swirling and it's hinted **Sony** might have its eyes set on **Square Enix**. In a recent interview with GamesIndustry.biz, Stephane D'Astous (the founder of Square Enix subsidiary Eidos Montréal) suggested Sony has been eager to get its hands on some of Square's most popular properties for a while. This makes sense given the collaborations between the two companies, which saw the likes of **Final Fantasy VII Remake** and the upcoming **Final Fantasy XVI** being released as limited-time platform exclusives – but there's a catch. According to D'Astous, Sony would only be interested in acquiring the Square Enix Tokyo. Sony's interest might help explain why Square made its recent baffling decision to sell off most of its Western properties, including **Tomb Raider** and **Deus Ex**, for a measly \$300 million. If the deal does happen, we could see even more platform exclusivity in future.

VR ready

PSVR2 has impressive features, including the ability to configure your play area

Finally, the days of stumbling over side tables and pets are no more.



After June's State Of Play showcase, in which we were treated to tantalising news about a handful of upcoming PSVR2 games, Sony has finally given more information on the specs and features we can expect from the headset itself, and about the quartet of cameras built into it in particular.

The most significant revelation is that the headset's array of funky front-facing cameras isn't just for show (although in our opinion those four lenses dotted around the front of the device still look cool). A new See-through mode lets you display your real-world surroundings on-screen at the tap of a button, and although the video feed is limited to black and white this still seems like a blessing for those of us who find themselves losing track of their controllers in the middle of a play session, or who don't want to take off the headset whenever someone comes into the room briefly.

The addition of cameras also makes it possible to precisely configure your designated play area (the virtual boundaries in place to stop you slamming into walls, bashing your shins, or breaking furniture) by pointing the controllers and drawing your own borders based on the space around you.

If creating boundaries each time you want a quick round of Beat Saber sounds like a chore, you will be pleased to learn that once a room profile has been created it will be saved to the system and automatically

enabled whenever you play in the same room. We're hoping that the ability to adjust to more cluttered spaces will finally make PSVR a viable option for players short on space who want to experience virtual reality – for most of us the biggest room in our homes is the living room, but not all of us want to game with our families around (and they don't always welcome us hogging the space).

NICE TO SEE

On a technical front, the headset's screen has been confirmed to display games at an eye-watering 4000x2040 resolution (that's 2000x2040 per eye), with a variable 90 to 120Hz refresh rate. That's not too shabby, and thanks to additional support for HDR, PSVR2 is already shaping up to be a huge advancement on its predecessor. Crisper visuals will make horror games scarier than ever, and owners of the HD Camera will be able to livestream their terrified real-world reactions alongside in-game footage.

★ There's no release date yet, but we expect more news soon.

Familiarity with the xenomorphs hasn't made them any less scary. These things will always be frightening.

We need more space

Prepare for more adventures in the Alien universe

This might not be a direct sequel to 2014's hair-raising hiding-in-the-cupboard simulator *Alien: Isolation*, but a new single-player "action-horror" title set in the Alien universe is finally on the way.

Although we've seen a handful of new Alien games in the last couple of years, most recently the horde shooter *Aliens: Fireteam Elite*, this shift back towards the films' horror roots suggests we're likely to

see something more in line with Creative Assembly's creepy masterpiece.

RIPLEY AND TEAR

Created by Survios in collaboration with 20th Century Games, this currently untitled project is set between the first two movies and follows a "battle-hardened veteran" coming face to face with the xenomorphs. Chronologically, it's going to be the closest we've come to the time *Alien: Isolation* is set, so fingers

crossed that the appearance of characters like Amanda Ripley is on the cards.

Given the studio's history – it was the developer of the VR exclusives *Creed: Rise To Glory* and *Westworld Awakening* – it should come as no real surprise that the project has also been confirmed to feature a VR component. For those of us who rely on hiding behind the cushions to get our horror fix, though, Survios has implied it'll be playable without a headset too. While the nature of the method of VR has yet to be confirmed, we'd bet our mining ships that PSVR2 will be on the cards. Imagine a facehugger with face haptics! Actually, now we're kind of wishing we hadn't...

■ The project has also been confirmed to feature a VR component... imagine a facehugger with face haptics! ■

★ It's still early days, but we're on a collision course for 2023.

DEV ACCESS

Second Sun

Garth DeAngelis explains how embracing your dark side in **Marvel's Midnight Suns** makes it an atypical Marvel game

Garth DeAngelis, lead producer on Marvel's **Midnight Suns**, tells us he's a big fan of antiheroes and villains, with Magneto holding a special place in his affections. While the X-Men's nemesis may not make an appearance in Firaxis' upcoming tactical action RPG, DeAngelis nonetheless assures us, "We have a lot of great villains in this title."

That's clear from the outset – an early fight includes a corrupted version of Venom. And Lilith is as formidable as any 'omega-level threat' supervillain the Avengers have faced. Except you won't just be fighting the dark as your custom character, the Hunter, you'll be able to embrace the darkness through dialogue choices. Which isn't to say that you'll suddenly turn on your allies.

"Dark definitely means antihero, which are some of the best heroes in the Marvel Universe," DeAngelis clarifies. "The Hunter is always good. It's just if you're making a dark dialogue choice, it's sort of, 'We're going to save the world at any cost, even if it means civilians are going to be collateral damage', whereas the light is always going to try and find the more overarching way that you can save everything."

That theme of darkness runs throughout **Midnight Suns**, which as an updated version of the original '90s *Rise Of The Midnight Sons* comic run already leans towards the supernatural side of the Marvel universe, which was rarely seen until recently. DeAngelis jokes that perhaps Firaxis had been under the mind control of Marvel all this time, with **Midnight Suns** plot bearing so many similarities to *Doctor Strange And The Multiverse Of Madness*. "I can't speak to that. I do know that they asked us what we wanted to do, and we're just naturally drawn to the fact the supernatural piece hadn't really been explored in the MCU," he notes. "And when we said that four years ago, it's true that it wasn't."

TACTICAL SOCIALISING

It's not just the theme that makes **Midnight Suns** different from your typical action-oriented Marvel game. The new

game is also a departure from the merciless strategy survival of *XCOM*, which Firaxis has been best known for over the past decade. **Midnight Suns** is still turn-based of course, but DeAngelis explains the team challenged themselves in how they approached it, asking themselves questions like 'How can we make it more intense by pulling down the camera and being pushed closer to the heroes?', ensuring that making decisions on the battlefield will feel as exciting as watching a scene from the MCU.

The difference he's most pleased with is the downtime you get between bursts of combat, when you get to interact with your fellow dressed-down superheroes back at the Abbey. While some of what you do there is important maintenance like

Dark means antihero, which are some of the best heroes in the Marvel Universe.

upgrading skills, you're also able just to relax and get to know one another.

"You can choose who you want to engage with from a personality standpoint, which we really think [...] fulfils one of the fantasies that we as gamers never felt in past Marvel titles," DeAngelis says. "We played a lot of Marvel games where there's attacking, which is great, but we never got to play the pieces of the comics where heroes would collaborate and strategise and maybe bicker a little bit and determine how they're going to work together. Every hero has their likes and dislikes that make sense with their character, so we really wanted to tap into that."



That dark, supernatural weirdness comes across – New York is transformed.

For the PS5 version, DeAngelis confirms the studio is working with a partner to utilise the console's features to deliver a more immersive experience. "I can't speak to where that stands right now, but there's some unique haptic support and audio design with the controller, as well as how you engage with photo mode with the touchpad, things are going to be unique to the PS5 DualSense," he says.

SUIT UP

If there's one thing that might raise alarm bells, it's a Marketplace tucked away in the menu options, which to us suggests microtransactions. DeAngelis allays our fears. "You'll be able to eventually buy post-release DLC there," he explains. This will include four characters currently in development, each with their own story missions. "At launch, you'll also be able to have access to cosmetic skins that harken back to a comic-book run or something else from the MCU, and these are cosmetic only, so it's just a little visual variety – no microtransactions!"

*** Explore your dark side when *Midnight Suns* is released on PS5 and PS4 on 7 Oct.**

1 The **Midnight Suns** are younger than the Avengers.

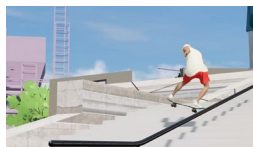
2 The Abbey isn't just menus but a real space to explore and hang out.

3 Don't think the action focus means there aren't debuffs. Watch out!





Lilith's corruption doesn't just extend to the usual bad guys. You also face Fallen Hulk, looking a different shade of green.



TALKING THE HAWK

Following the recent rumour (started by the Birdman himself, who should know) that Activision had canned development of its Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 & 4 remasters, we're hoping Skate will scratch our skateboarding itch.

PlayStation voices

The month in mouthing off

"THE MOVIE WILL BE RELEASED IN JAPAN IN TWO MONTHS. I CAN'T WAIT." SONIC CREATOR YUJI NAKA IS EAGER TO SEE HIS HERO ON THE BIG SCREEN.



"EXCITING NEWS! I'M WORKING ON A NEW FPS." JOHN ROMERO, THE FATHER OF BOOMER SHOOTERS, IS BACK AND WORKING ON A FRESH GAME.

"I HEARD A RUMOUR THAT SOME FOLKS WANTED A PHYSICAL VERSION OF PSYCHONAUTS 2? I HOPE THAT WASN'T A JOKE." PSYCHONAUTS DESIGNER TIM SCHAFER UNVEILS SOME SNAZZY PHYSICAL EDITIONS. WE WANT!



Skate free

The long-awaited next entry in the skateboarding series will be free to play



Numbers aren't the only thing vanishing from EA's long-awaited Skate revival: its price tag is disappearing too. Now titled simply Skate instead of Skate 4, this free-to-play followup isn't a conventional sequel or reboot, but rather a model that the developer insists will represent the "authentic evolution of the Skate franchise". Supported as a live service with frequent content updates and plenty of seasonal events, we expect to be landing ollies, making kickflips, and breaking bones for years to come.

Everything we've seen of the 'pre-pre-pre-alpha' footage that dominated the latest raft of trailers suggests development is still in its very, very, very, early stages. Even so, series fans can rest easy knowing that the game is in the capable hands of developer Full Circle, a new EA studio helmed by veteran Skate staff.

MULTI-COMBO

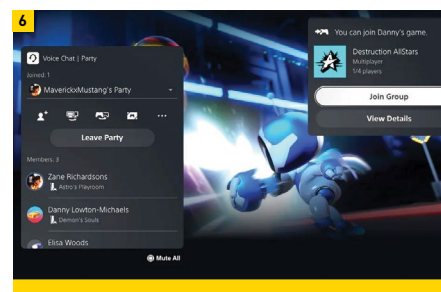
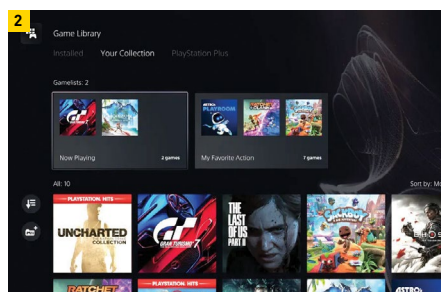
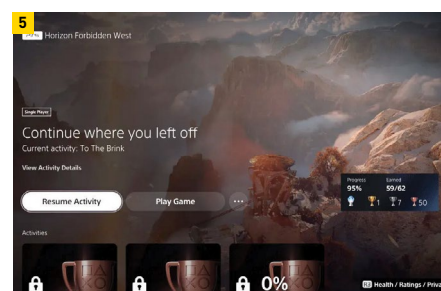
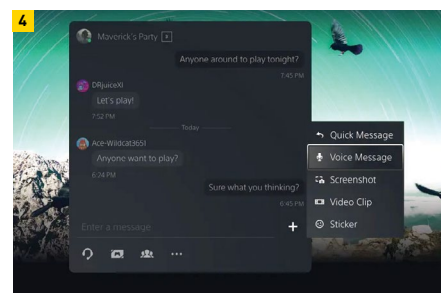
Although long-time players can expect the return of some of their favourite modes and mechanics, the all-new city of San Vansterdam promises to be an urban playground unlike anything we've seen before. Environments are bigger and more detailed than ever, while collaborative

areas known as 'CollaboZones' will allow budding skatepark designers to create and share their own portions of the map.

From what we've seen so far, these CollaboZones will offer an unprecedented amount of creative freedom, and could be a gamechanger in terms of longevity – we've seen players building everything from comically large ramps to some kind of human pachinko machine. Part of Skate's appeal has always been its underlying physical silliness, so it's good to know that those of us more interested in seeing our unlucky avatars suffer than any kind of serious skateboarding simulation will still have plenty to keep us occupied.

For those worried about monetisation, we've also been assured that any potential future map expansions or new areas will be delivered free, with microtransactions reserved for cosmetic items only.

★ What do you want to see from Skate? Give us a shout @PLAYgamingmag.



1 There's a mic there. 2 Gamelists should help you keep things organised. 3 1440p is good news if you've been holding out on upgrading to 4K. 4 Chatting with groups has never been easier. 5 Activity cards are more prominent. 6 Notifications for party members should take the hassle out of joining games.

Folder beholder

PS5's beta brings 1440p support and more personalisation

The latest PS5 beta is rolling out now, so check your email for that invitation. This year alone PS5 has seen the addition of a party system, the ability to filter your library by genre, and numerous UI tweaks. The latest update continues the trend by giving us a peek at some of the highly requested features that'll soon be making their way to your console.

For starters, your game library screen is receiving an overhaul in the form of

'gamelists'. They're not quite the same as PS4's home screen folders, but creating a gamelist enables you to group games or applications together at the top of the Your Collection screen. Given the recent arrival of the PlayStation Stars loyalty program, which awards points for every store purchase you make, this is the perfect way to keep track of your expanding library.

HEAR HEAR

3D audio is receiving some love just in time for the release of Sony's InZone

headsets, in the form of the option to compare samples of stereo and 3D audio while adjusting your sound profile. This should help you hear the difference between both settings and choose the option you prefer. You can also finally use your fancy headset (or just your DualSense's mic, if you prefer) to send voice messages to your party, cutting out the need to type out lengthy text messages in online play sessions.

Among other features, on the settings menu there's added support for 1440p displays; party members will now be told when you start a joinable game; and activity cards are receiving a tweak to help you resume your in-game activities faster.

Creating a gamelist enables you to group games or applications together at the top of the Your Collection screen.

Are you a big fan of folders? Let us know: play@futurenet.com

GEAR: STUFF WE LOVE

New monitor? You should look into it



INZONE GAMING MONITORS

SONY £999/TBC [ELECTRONICS.SONY.COM](https://electronics.sony.com)

Boasting a 27-inch 144Hz 4K display and enhanced contrast, Sony's new InZone M9 monitor is perfect if you won't settle for anything but the best. Even the M3, its cheaper (but no smaller) sibling, is notable for its blisteringly fast 240Hz refresh rate. Tailor-made for use with PS5, both these swanky displays match the console's sleek looks.



INZONE H9, H7, AND H3 GAMING HEADSETS

SONY £269/£189/£89 [ELECTRONICS.SONY.COM](https://electronics.sony.com)

Hearing is important too, so grab some headphones to accompany your fancy new display. Although the wired-only H3 is a good budget option thanks to its spatial audio, it's worth upgrading to the wireless H7 for added convenience. If you have money to burn, the pricy H9 offers fantastic noise cancellation.



WD_BLACK SN850 NVME SSD FOR PS5

WESTERN DIGITAL £289.99/£179.99
[SHOP.WESTERNDIGITAL.COM](https://shop.westerndigital.com)

If the prospect of finding a PS5-compatible SSD makes your head spin, the officially licensed SN850 is for you. A built-in heatsink makes installation hassle free, and splashing out on the 2TB model will future-proof your storage for years to come.



SONY HT-A7000

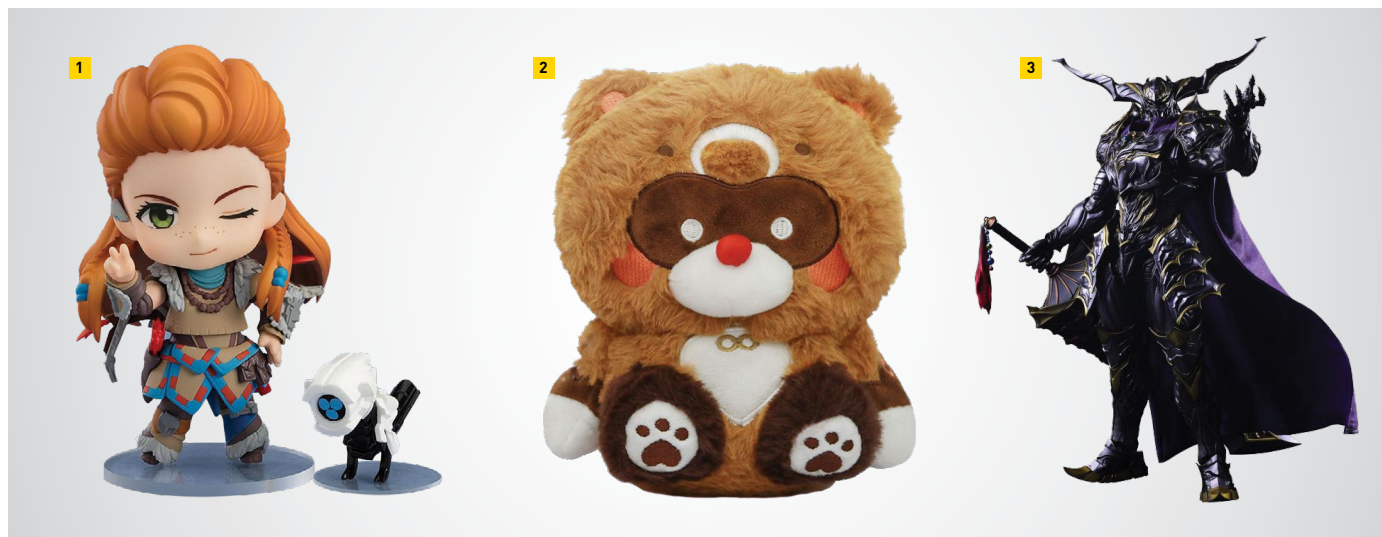
SONY £1,299 [SONY.CO.UK](https://sony.co.uk)

It's not cheap, but ditching your tired old speakers in favour of a good soundbar can make all the difference to the level of immersion you get while gaming. With a fancy sound mapping system which uses an array of microphones to adapt to the size of your room, the HT-A7000's premium audio experience is second to none.

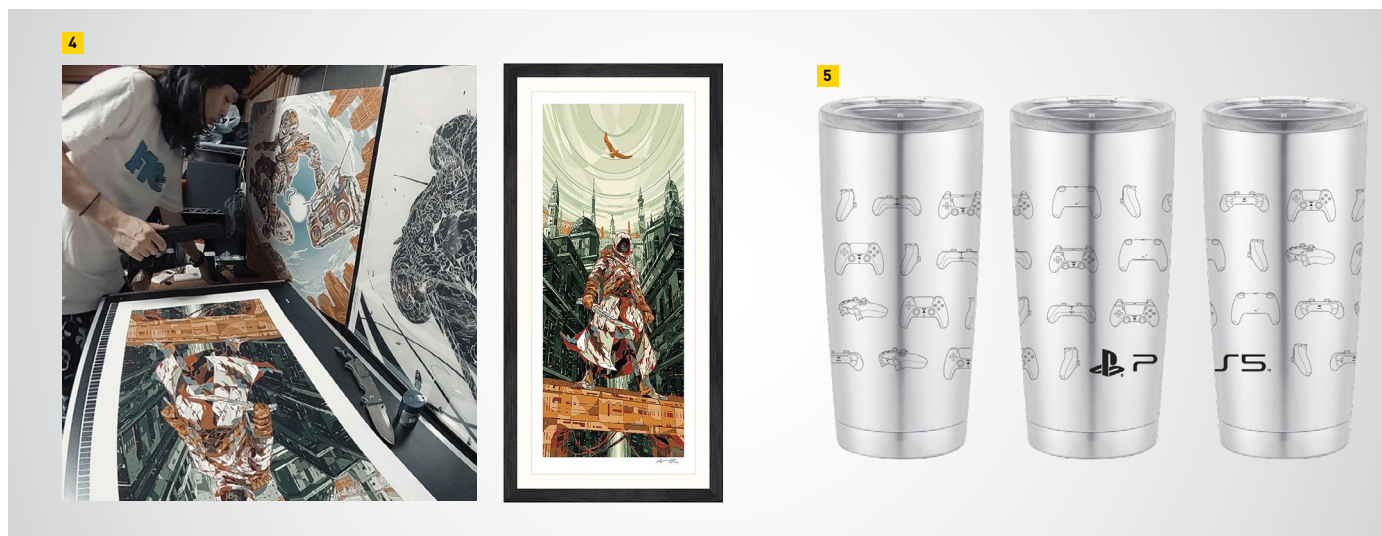


IN THE ZONE

The InZone products match your PS5's appearance (and are PC-compatible, if you use one). Dare we hope for headsets in colours to match the DualSense range?



No desk setup would be complete without game-themed ornaments. We're big fans of the compact **1 Nendoroid Aloy figurine** (£54.95, gamersheek.co.uk), and this squeezable **2 Genshin Impact Guoba Plush** (\$34.99, store.crunchyroll.com). You could also remortgage the house to preorder this magnificent **3 Stranger Of Paradise: Final Fantasy Origin Play Arts Kai Jack Garland Action Figure** (£209.99, store.eu.square-enix-games.com). If figures aren't your style, adorn your walls with this limited-edition **4 The Holy City Limited Print** by HR-FM (\$119.99-\$249.99, eyesonwalls.com) or sip your delicious gamer juices from this **5 DualSense Wireless Controller Stainless Tumbler** (£16.98, gear.eu.playstation.com).



DASH'S CASH SPLASH



I've always wanted to buy my own rocket launcher, but legal experts have suggested that purchasing explosive weapons is against the law.

Fortunately, Nerf has stepped up to help make my dream a reality by creating a limited-edition blaster based on Destiny 2's super-rare Gjallarhorn rocket launcher. Designed in

1:1 scale and measuring over a metre long, it's a faithful and absolutely gigantic replica of the formidable virtual weapon. It doesn't fire real explosives, but showering your enemies with Nerf mega darts is the next best thing. Owners of the in-game Gjallarhorn can preorder it right now; it'll go on general sale at a future date.

Got it in-game? Preorder the Nerf version from bungiestore.com now for \$185.



THE BIG SHOT

Inner demons

Keep an eye on Mato Anomalies

Have your favourite magnifying glass and deerstalker hat at the ready, because your detective work is the only thing standing between the futuristic metropolis of Mato and a full-scale demon invasion. So much for a relaxing city break...

Taking control of two protagonists, moody detective Doe and bandaged exorcist Gram, it's your job to collect clues and investigate the otherworldly portals plaguing the town. Built upon the ruins of a destroyed Eastern city, Mato looks like being the perfect setting for a good old-fashioned mystery. It's delightfully bleak and filled with secrets, and venturing through its ruined streets and shabby shops is a must on your quest to uncover the truth.

We were impressed by developer Arrowiz's last detective venture, the stylish murder mystery *Hermitage: Strange Case Files*, so this renewed focus on investigation is extremely promising. Detective segments are broken up by more traditional RPG combat, with Gram's frequent trips to the dungeons of the demonic underworld allowing you to take on the demon threat directly. The way the party members share health pools suggests a deeper connection between them, so we're eager to see what kinds of story twists are in store.





Numbers Game

We do the maths

313

Minutes of beautiful music on the Babylon's Fall soundtrack CD – something to relax to.

17,999

Pennies will be leaving your bank account if you preorder the pricy God Of War Ragnarök Collector's Edition.

07

Long years have passed between the start of cat-'em-up Stray's development and release – flip to p70 to see if it was worth the wait.

330,000

Nazi testicles were exploded in single week by Sniper Elite 5 players.

96

Pages of all-out Apex action in the first volume of the Apex Legends comic book from Dark Horse.

50,000,000

Players have been falling over themselves to get crowns in Fall Guys. That's a whole lot of beans.

DEBATE

Which FPS series should be revived next?

As Killzone Shadow Fall finally winds down, PlayStation could use a shooter king



MILFORD COPPOCK
MANAGING ART EDITOR



THE IDEA OF STOMPING AROUND IN A DUALSENSE-CONTROLLED MECH IS TANTALISING.

I realise Respawn Entertainment has a lot on its Star Wars-shaped plate at the moment with Jedi: Survivor and an FPS set in the Star Wars universe, but that doesn't stop me wanting a Titanfall sequel. One of the best FPSs on PS4, Titanfall 2 could compete with the big boys, thanks in no small part to clever level design ('Effect And Cause'). The DualSense's haptics and triggers would let you feel the heft of your mech and the weight of your weapons as you stomp through the world. Add PSVR2 support and I'm sold. ■

■ **Killzone doesn't deserve to fall by the wayside. It should be celebrated.** ■



JESSICA KINGHORN
GAMES EDITOR



I'VE ONLY GOT ONE LEADING LADY IN MY SIGHTS."

A little Emma Peel, a little 007, what's not to like about Cate Archer? The enduring protagonist of 2002's The Operative: No One Lives Forever, the '60s spy is more than equipped for a new mission – and I'm not just talking about her exploding lipsticks or lockpick barrettes, both of which I'd still quite like in my own private arsenal. At present, developer Monolith Productions is hard at work on a Wonder Woman game, and the rights situation surrounding Archer's adventures are decidedly murky besides. A return may be unlikely but every spy values the element of surprise. ■



OSCAR TAYLOR-KENT
EDITOR



WHY LOOK ANYWHERE ELSE? KILLZONE IS RIGHT THERE, AND DUE A COMEBACK."

Thanks to Horizon's rise to fame, the last few years have taught us that when it comes to getting the most out of PlayStation, Guerrilla Games knows how to get it done like few others. But I just hope the action adventure series doesn't become the only egg in the studio's basket. Killzone has always been a series in which graphical prowess was balanced with excellent science-fiction-flavoured gunplay, and it doesn't deserve to fall by the wayside. It should be celebrated.

That said, it could definitely use a revamp. Take it back to basics with a soft reboot centring new characters and you could really create a science fiction story that feels like something special, able to stand toe-to-toe with the greats, all while having the live-service shooter of PlayStation's dreams on the side. A gamble? Perhaps. But one of the safest you'll ever see. ■



DASHIELL WOOD
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



I WANT MY FIREFIGHTS TO HAVE TACTICAL FLAIR."

Mowing down wave after wave of baddies is always a good recipe for mindless fun, but adding a dash of thought can take things to another level. Given the disappointing state of once-great tactical shooter series like Ghost Recon, I feel like it's finally time to bring back Brothers In Arms. Now relegated to the realm of the occasional licensed mobile tie-in, it's a little sad to see that this former titan of the genre being left to rot. Just imagine how cool a modern take on Brothers In Arms might be. Thanks to the power of PS5, we could be directing squads of soldiers across some of the largest, most complex battlefields we've seen in the series so far. Challenging your reflexes is fine, but, as far as I'm concerned, challenging your brain is better. ■

DUSK DIVER 2

Dusk Diver 2 continues the story of Yumo and her friends, taking up arms once again to protect the Human Realm from dimensional evils that are converging on Taipei's bustling Ximending neighborhood and its dark underworld, Youshanding.

Who can Yumo and the Guardians of Kunlun trust?
What consequences of their past will they face?
Fight to find the truth and save the city once again!



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www.store.iffyseurope.com



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for more info!

www.duskdiver2.iffyseurope.com

!f IDEA FACTORY **JUSTDAN** **wanin**

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IN
THE
MOOD
FOR...



Ninja

Spies, assassins, and fashion pioneers – they make the face mask look good

1 METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SONS OF LIBERTY

We know ninja are cool, but so are robots. MGS2 gives us Mr X, taking over from the original Metal Gear Solid cyborg ninja Grey Fox. It also introduces pretty boy protagonist Raiden, who becomes something of a cyborg ninja himself in later entries.

2 TENCHU: WRATH OF HEAVEN

Before Dark Souls kicked our behinds, FromSoftware brought us the Tenchu series. It's ninja action to its core – you sneak around, run across rooftops, stealthily kill people, the whole deal. Wrath Of Heaven gets the edge here for its multiplayer modes. Who says ninja have to be solitary?

3 SEKIRO: SHADOWS DIE TWICE

Almost a successor to Tenchu, in Sekiro not only is the main character a ninja, you're pitted against enemies with dangerous ninjutsu skills of their own. Purple ninja can prove quite the challenge, and as they can be stealthy you might not know where they're coming from. (Hint: look up!)

4 HAKUOKI: KYOTO WINDS

While the initial roster of love interests centred on the Shinsengumi, the selection grew with updates, and loyal ninja Yamazaki became an option. There are other ninja around, but this one is handsome and dateable. Bonus points for romantic CGs and potential vampirism.

5 DISGAEA 2: CURSED MEMORIES

While ninja has been an available class for characters created at the Dark Assembly since the first Disgaea, the second instalment adds the female counterpart, kunoichi. The randos you send into battle aren't the sole ninja rep either: party member Yukimaru is a kunoichi too. Time to create an unstoppable ninja army, zam!

6 NINJA USAGIMARU: TWO TAILS OF ADVENTURE

Ninja games aren't just about skulking about in the shadows and looking mean. This platformer puts you in control of a ninja who happens to be a rabbit person.

7 NINJA GAIDEN: MASTER COLLECTION

Why settle for one ninja when you can have several? Across the three Ninja Gaiden games, Ayane, Momiji, and Kasumi join enigmatic lead Ryu Hayabusa. Less sneaky, more fast-paced stabbing and slashing with gore aplenty, this is the pinnacle of ninja cool when you get into a bloody flow.

8 TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: SHREDDER'S REVENGE

Truly the members of this team are icons among both ninja and turtlekind alike, and this beat-'em-up arcade homage is a great way to shell out some damage in nostalgic style. Cowabunga!

9 JUDGMENT

Beat self-proclaimed ninja warrior Ryan Acosta at 'shuriken' (read: darts) and in one-on-one combat and he'll become your friend for life, popping up from time to time to fight on the side of Clan Yagami in street battles. Play your befriending cards right and he'll pitch in to help take down the Keihin Gang.

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Ghost Of Tsushima

While Jin's journey is all about what it means to be a samurai, his Ghost style incorporates plenty of stealth and tools and tactics with ninja flair.

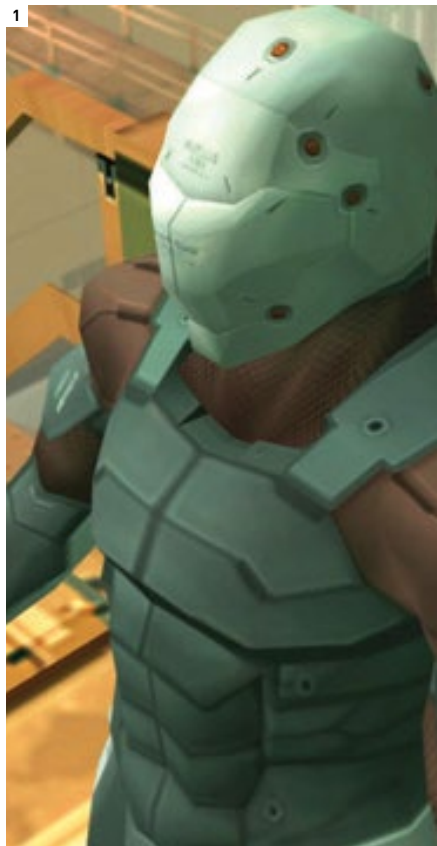
Soulcalibur VI

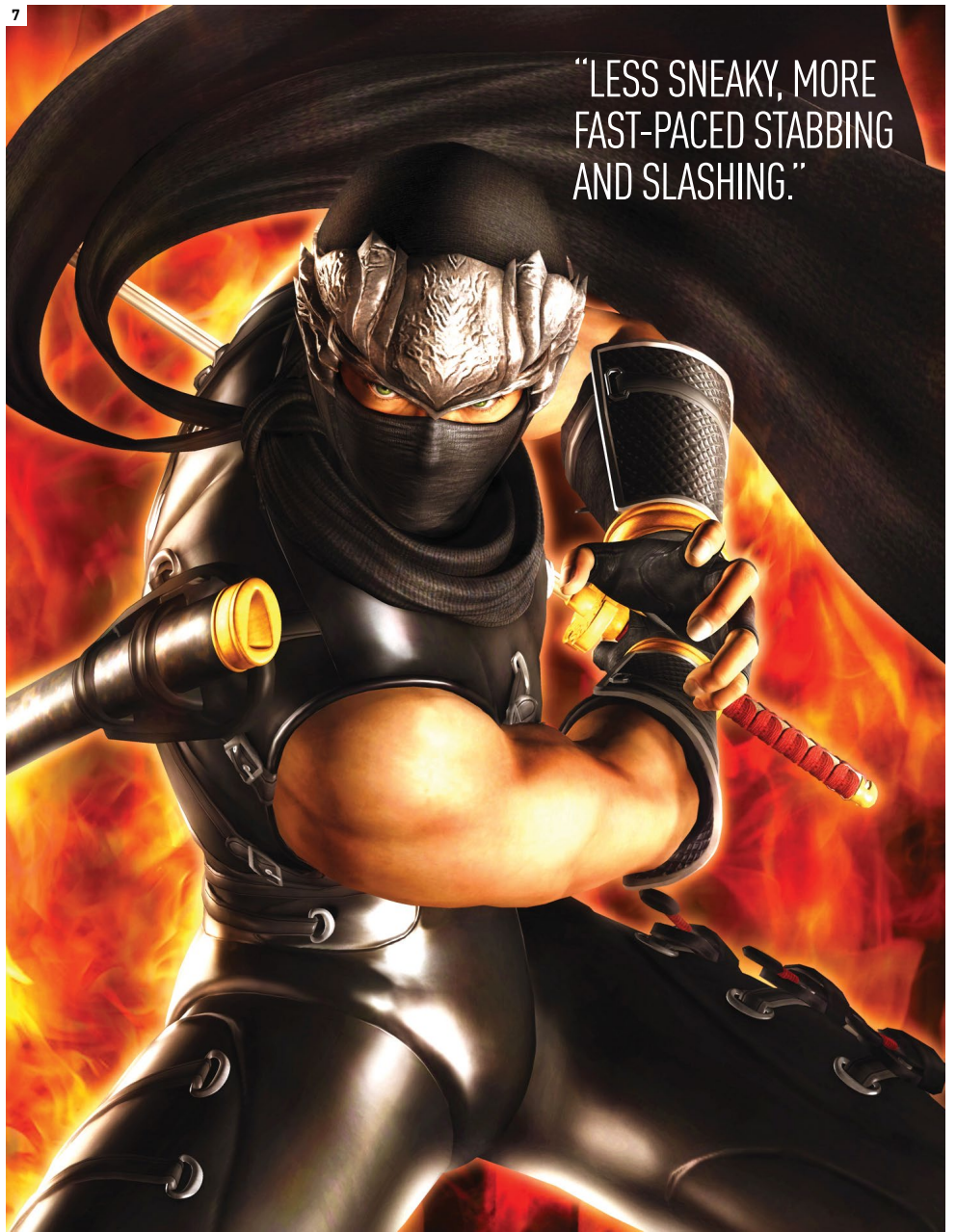
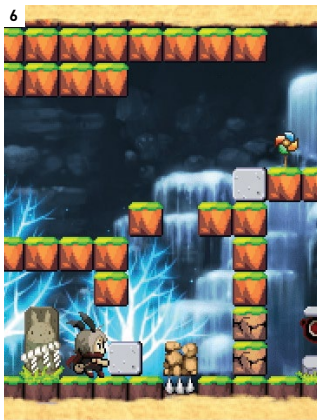
Twin-blade-wielding ninja Taki has been playable since Soul Blade and now lends her agile fighting style to custom created characters.

Final Fantasy VII Remake – Episode Intermission

Putting aside the Buster Sword for something lighter, this expansion directly follows cheery ninja Yuffie.

Did we miss your favourite ninja? Got an In The Mood For idea? Show and tell at twitter.com/PLAYgamingmag





Teach me how to be the ultimate ninja warrior! I'll call you "Master" till the day I perish from this world!

OPINION

"WE'VE REACHED PEAK REMAKE, AND I'M REALLY NOT HERE FOR IT."

Life's too short to keep going over old ground, even if it looks nicer



WRITER BIO

Harry Shepherd's backlog is so vast the thought of replaying a game even once gives him a serious case of the stress shivers.

2022 feels a bit like opening all your best presents as soon as you wake up on Christmas Day. With *Horizon Forbidden West*, *Elden Ring*, and *Gran Turismo Sport* already behind us, suddenly we find ourselves looking ahead to... well, not much. Besides the return of a certain bearded demigod dad, we're in need of something else to unwrap.

This made this year's 'E3' all the more important. Sony's June State Of Play and Summer Game Fest promised to reveal something to fill the gaps in our calendars. Yet, once the dust settled, I couldn't help feeling disappointed: I just can't get excited for more remakes.

Some of the biggest headlines from this summer are rebuilds of existing games. The *Last Of Us Part I* is set for 2 September this year, with *Resident Evil 4 Remake* joining the *Dead Space* remake next year. Each is correctly considered a classic, but even though I adore all three, the prospect of returning to them with new technical bells and whistles for PS5 doesn't thrill me.

DÉJÀ NEW

That said, it's clear why the trend of rereleasing existing games has only



It doesn't matter how many times it's tweaked or remade, *The Last Of Us* will always be a classic.

accelerated. Yes, it's extremely expensive and time-consuming for developers to create new IPs, stories, and universes. It's also risky: after spending all that time and money, the game just might not be successful enough. Remakes, on the other hand, are a much safer bet, even more than sequels, since the publisher has a sense of its existing popularity and community. Remakes sell well enough to justify publishers releasing more. Remakes aren't without merit either; they give newer PlayStation players the chance to experience older games in a more appealing and accessible way, too, and there's nothing wrong with a healthy helping of nostalgia now and again.

Regardless, it's hard to not feel a little disheartened when the next big reveal is another remake. No matter the graphical enhancements or performance improvements, there's always the sense we're going over old ground. Prettier ground, perhaps, but nothing beats the feeling of discovering something new.

The *Last Of Us* remains one of the best PlayStation games ever made, but given it's been little more than a decade since the original's release – and with the game having been remastered for PS4 in that time – it's unlikely I'll be going back. Especially not for £70. It may have looked and played spectacularly before, and no doubt will again on PS5, but it will endure because of something that transcends any technical update: its story. The themes of love, family, and survival will stay as powerful ever, regardless of the machine it's on.

So is this the future of games? Publishers rereleasing and us replaying the same experiences on every new PlayStation, stuck in an endless time loop of remasters, remakes, and reimaginings at the expense of adventurous new games and IPs? I really hope not, because I want something better. I want to explore uncharted planets, meet different characters, and save strange worlds. I want something new.

Nothing beats the feeling of discovering something new.

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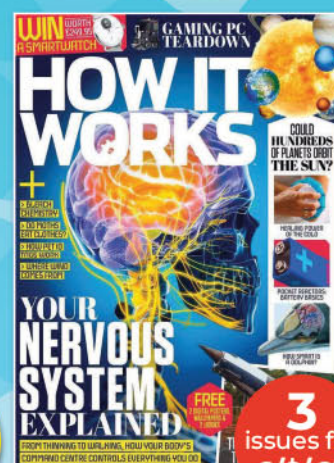
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OPINION

"IN THE MODERN SHOOTER MARKET, I'M HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO."

If there's one thing this gen needs, it's the return of the hero shooter



WRITER BIO

A die-hard shooter player and former avid Overwatch fan, Dashiell Wood is eagerly searching for his next hero shooter fix.

There was a time when we practically couldn't move for hero shooters. A hybrid subgenre formed from a hotchpotch of more conventional shooter mechanics and MOBA-like character abilities, this slew of fast-paced multiplayer titles helped breathe new life into the shooter genre through not only their colourful graphics but a level of lore and worldbuilding more commonly associated with fully-fledged RPGs.

At a time when the term 'shooter' had mostly become synonymous with legions of faceless soldiers, drab grey-brown colour palettes, and dime-a-dozen modern military settings, it's easy to see why even long-running series like Black Ops and Rainbow Six were eager to ditch their stale trappings and jump on the hero shooter train.

While the term 'hero shooter' was coined for Battleborn, and the astronomical popularity of Overwatch (released the same year) truly cemented the subgenre's place in gaming culture, it's hard to overstate how exciting the wider climate was. As more and more studios piled in and attempted to inject innovative mechanics into an already-treasured genre, innovation was everywhere. With the arrival of each unique 'hero', 'operator', or 'specialist', some of our

favourite series finally felt fresh again. It's easy to poke fun at the less successful likes of Battleborne, Lawbreakers, or Crucible, and claim that the genre got oversaturated too quickly, but it's hard to argue that each of these attempts didn't at least try to bring something different to the table.

HERO TO ZERO

Only a few years later, not only is there a lack of big new shooters on the whole, predominantly the result of understandable delays in development, the hero shooter subgenre feels all but dead. Now only a small handful of more recent titles such as 2019's Apex Legends are still managing to maintain solid playerbases, and the seemingly endless stream of releases which were once a source of such innovation has all but dried out.

It seems emblematic that even a former titan like Overwatch has fallen from grace, with its threadbare relaunch as Overwatch 2 struggling to revive even a fraction of the dwindling interest that helped make the game such a cultural phenomenon back at launch. Considering the current lack of any real competition, it seems like there's never been a better time for the hero shooter to make a quick and triumphant return on console (where's our Valorant port, Riot?).

Given the huge graphical capabilities of PS5, I'm excited to see what more daring attempts at innovative art styles could create. We've seen plenty of photorealism, but higher-fidelity visuals also open the door to some great character design possibilities, and technology like spatial audio or adaptive triggers could prove the cornerstone for exciting new mechanics. With the likes of Bungie and Haven Studios now bolstering PlayStation's multiplayer foundations, this could all be set to change over the next few years. But these things take time (a lot of which was spent on Destruction All-Stars, of all things) and looking at the lukewarm reception for Overwatch 2, it's clear that we need innovation fast if the genre is to survive.



Is it time for the Black Ops specialist system to make a return? Maybe...

Only a small handful of titles still maintain solid playerbases.

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REPLIES

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#17 A be-Guille-ing cover; we spoke to Capcom about Street Fighter 6.

BLOCKBUSTED

I'm looking towards the end of the year and all I want to know is where are the blockbusters? Kratos is capable of taking on all-comers, but this autumn he isn't going to have any real competition. Goat Simulator 3? Give me a break! No, give me some more must-play games. If Sony wants to shift more PS5s it needs to give people more reasons to buy a console.

Gary Cavendish

Triple-A titles are thin on the ground towards the end of the year, but that's because we've already been treated to Horizon

Forbidden West, Elden Ring, Gran Turismo 7, Ghostwire Tokyo and many more. And we have great hopes for Skull And Bones (see p6) and The Callisto Protocol, as well as God Of War. Trust us, 2022 is a vintage year!

EW, GIRLS

All this talk about GTA getting a female protagonist is nonsense. At least I hope it is. There are some missions that

just won't work with a female character. 'Spud'

We're pretty sure we've never done a 'wee standing up' mission in GTA, and as this issue's free mini-mag shows, we've played a lot of GTA. We have played as a female protagonist in GTA Online, and can assure you it hasn't stopped us nicking cars or shooting people.

STREAMS SILENTLY

I've seen a lot of people worrying about games being taken off streaming services and them never being able to play them, but why worry? There will always be more games. And it's not like old tech works forever.

Dan Kavanaugh

It's a bit galling to pay for something and not choose when you get rid of it, though. And we'd hate to see any game lost entirely. Preservation matters!

"KRATOS CAN TAKE ON ALL-COMERS, BUT THIS AUTUMN HE ISN'T GOING TO HAVE ANY REAL COMPETITION."

STAR LETTER PICK YOUR FIGHTER

Thanks for your feature on Street Fighter. I've always loved fighting games, but it feels like they've become less popular as gamers have turned to shooters – maybe it's an online thing; fighters are best when you're in the same room as the person you're playing with. So it's great to see Capcom putting loads of love and care into the old gang once more.

One thing that does bother me is the talk of 'modern' controls. If those of us who learned on early fighters can manage to use a modern controller, can't gamers who've always used controllers get used to the classic

controls in Street Fighter? Part of the appeal of the fighters is the satisfaction you can take in your developing skills.

I shouldn't grumble, though – the new controls might make my kids agree to go a few rounds with me.

Kev Anderson

Glad you liked it – we do enjoy a good fighting game. And who knows, maybe Street Fighter 6 will be the game that makes your kids love them too. If you're into retro fighters, check out our review of Capcom Arcade 2nd Stadium on p91. It contains a number of vintage beat-'em-ups – and no modern controls there.



CAN I GET A RT?

The most pleasing tweetings from our timeline...



@socialanigirl
I may have the only copy of @PLAYgamingmag in Japan because family included it in my last parcel?

It does mean I can see my Kingdom Hearts cafe article in the flesh tho :3



@Red_Hol
Time to give #Stray a go. Will it get the mew of approval?!

[Oooh, cute kitty! – Ed]



@Dirkgently1066
I've only played it for about 20 minutes but I'm already fairly certain that Stray is game of the year #Meow



@Paradox_Wolf
Who owns the rights to Locoroco now we need an official Locoroco 3!

TROLL OF THE MONTH



Sonic fans
They really didn't like our choice of five least favourite Sonic games in PLAY #18... Gotta go waaaaah!



@mitchjaylineham
Lady D harnessing her inner gamer rage

[*eyes glaze over* – the whole team]



@Maidenfan18
I grew up reading PSM and Official U.S. Playstation Magazine in the mid-late 90's, and now PLAY continues that tradition as required monthly reading. Keep up the great work!



"DEAD SPACE HAD A GREAT STORYLINE. THAT'S WHAT COUNTS. WILL THE CALLISTO PROTOCOL HAVE THAT TOO?"

CARLOS GOUVEIA WANTS A STORY WITH HIS SCARES



"CAN'T WAIT. DEAD SPACE IS EASILY ONE OF THE GOAT'S. ISAAC CLARKE IS A LEGEND!"

DONOVAN DURKES JUST WANTS TCP

READERS' MOST WANTED

Which games are bleeping loudest on your radar?

01

God Of War Ragnarök

As one of our letter writers this issue points, Kratos is capable of taking on all-comers. He's still your number 1.

FORMAT PS5, PS4
ETA 9 NOV

02

Resident Evil 4 Remake

Fancy a trip to Spain next year? It'll be ever so lovely next March...

FORMAT PS5
ETA 24 MAR

03

The Callisto Protocol

One of this winter's most intriguing titles. Can it scare us *that* much?

FORMAT PS5, PS4
ETA 2 DEC



VOTE NOW!

Tell us the five games you can't wait to play at play@futurenet.com

05

Black Myth: Wukong

A game based on the classic Journey To The West, by a Chinese developer? This is going to be great.

FORMAT PS5, PS4
ETA 2023

04

Final Fantasy XVI

The Eikonic RPG series looks like going from strength to strength.

FORMAT PS5
ETA 2023

EXIT POLL

Our Facebook fans answer a final question



WHO'S THE BEST PIRATE ON PLAYSTATION?

27% Look skyward, to FFXII's Balthier.

17% Doff their straw hats to Monkey D Luffy.

12% Fight like a cow! And pick Guybrush Threepwood.

34% Say FFXVII's Captain Cid. Will he return?

2% Chose Soulcalibur's Cervantes de Leon.

8% Raise the Black Flag with Edward Kenway.

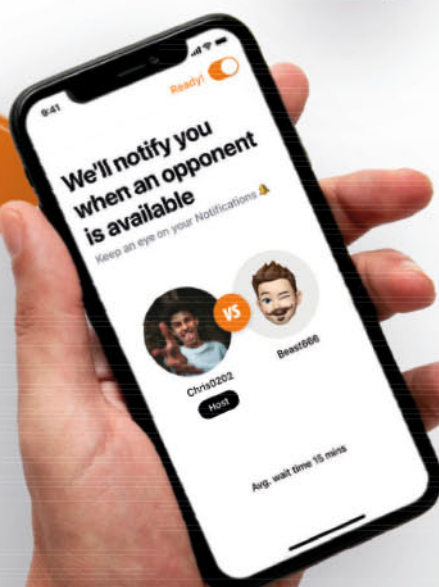
NEXT MONTH

Two's company – which pair are your fave Playstation duo?



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Previews



"HORDES OF
DEADLY
DINOS."

42 Exoprimal



032 Soulstice

Sisters are doing it for themselves
in this stylish action adventure

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ROLLER DRAMA 41 | FIFA 23 44 | LABYRINTH OF GALLERIA: THE MOON SOCIETY 46 | LET'S SING PRESENTS ABBA 47
STAR TREK PRODIGY: SUPERNOVA 47 | AD INFINITUM 47 | WARHAMMER 40,000: SHOOTAS, BLOOD AND TEEF 47

"THERE'S A CLASSIC CHARACTER
ACTION VIBE REMINDING US OF
THE FIRST DEVIL MAY CRY."



The bigger they are, the
harder they fall – and
the more plentiful the
upgrade coins to scoop up.

F FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 20 SEP / **PUB** MODUS GAMES
DEV REPLY GAME STUDIOS / **PLAYERS** 1

Soulstice

Hey, soul sister

Siblings should have each others' backs no matter what. Briar and Lute, however, take this a bit more literally than most, one literally poking out of the other. They've become a chimera, fused together, meaning Briar gets enhanced strength and Lute has been turned into a ghost. It's a recipe for some rip-roaring stylish action.

The sisters might technically be two people, but going hands-on it's clear they operate as one. That is, after all, why the chimera was created by the order they serve – they're the only beings that can fight back against wraiths. Which, for us, means using Briar's oversized sword and other equally large weapons to whack them into dust.

As we approach a castle under siege, the sometimes-fixed camera angles highlight some impressive vistas, and our first few scuffles are capped off with a medal ranking. There's a classic character action vibe, reminding us of the very first Devil May Cry, but Soulstice has more than a few tricks up its armoured sleeves.

SOUL SACRIFICE

Though Briar is the one dishing out the pain, making light and heavy attacks with different weapons which we use to slide into foes or tee them off into the air for an air juggle, Lute is also key to

victory. Her initial powers revolve around controlling space, and what better way is there to do that than by using spatial awareness to counter attacks?

As the legions of darkness surround us, we notice their attack wind-ups are indicated by a prompt. When pressed, Lute will go on the defensive without interrupting whatever streak Briar is on. This often temporarily slows enemies, which Briar can take advantage of by dodge-rolling out the way, and then jumping back in with a new combo.

This becomes vital once the bigger goons show up. Early on these range

from bulky lads in round armour to swooping aerial wraiths. We get Lute to deploy a field of coloured energy – either blue or red – to make the latter vulnerable to attack. (The energy fields are also used to hoover up some collectibles). We're immediately reminded of Team Ninja's penchant for colour-coded weapons and enemies, but Lute's timed shield (it depletes a meter that restores quite quickly if you don't burn it out) feels better here as it doesn't

interfere with Briar's activity, it only affects how we choose to violently organise the chaos around us.

We need to bring all the pair's abilities together against the stage's boss, an angular archer aptly named Arrowhead who can zap around the arena like lightning. We counter barrages of arrows; we strike down after-images of the archer by matching Lute's energy to their colour; and henchmen stumble »

FACTRICK

1. DOUBLE ACT

Stefanie Joosten voices Briar and Lute. She's also known for providing the voice and capture for MGS V's Quiet.

2. GOING BERSERK

Briar's armour and sword design seem to nod towards manga series Berserk, with other influences teased.

3. ORDER, ORDER

The truth behind the sisters' past will be important to the story, and might suggest a Devil Trigger-like element.

TRACK RECORD

The gaming division of Italian company Reply Group, Reply Game Studios worked on Joe Dever's Lone Wolf, based on the gamebook series, and VR game Theseus, based on the myth of Theseus and the minotaur.



» in for us to take out (handy for restoring health).

You can increase and develop both sisters' skills by spending blue and red crystals (one colour for each sister, so you'll improve them both at about the same rate). This does invite the same problem as the earlier Devil May Cry games – that almost-necessary skills are locked away until too far into the game – but we're happy to fool around with the combos on offer.

Don't expect an overwhelming amount of variety like in Bayonetta. Again like in Devil May Cry, each weapon's combos are more limited, even taking into account what can be unlocked, and the key is to assess the different utility of each one. However, here you can switch some weapons on the fly, meaning you'll eventually build up more options.

MEDAL OF HONOUR

A tear in the sky has unleashed a stream of wraiths upon this place – the city of Ilden. The sisters' journey will take them throughout its Gothic streets. The opening level we play has us running across a huge bridge towards the city itself, then poking around some rooms before a bust-up in a courtyard. Some

basic platforming allows for verticality, like ascending towers, but this is mostly a game where you fight through rooms and hallways filled with enemies. Large though the environment is, the action is stage-based (complete with a score card when you beat each one), though secrets are hidden out of the way, from extra currency to optional fights that help you net a higher score.

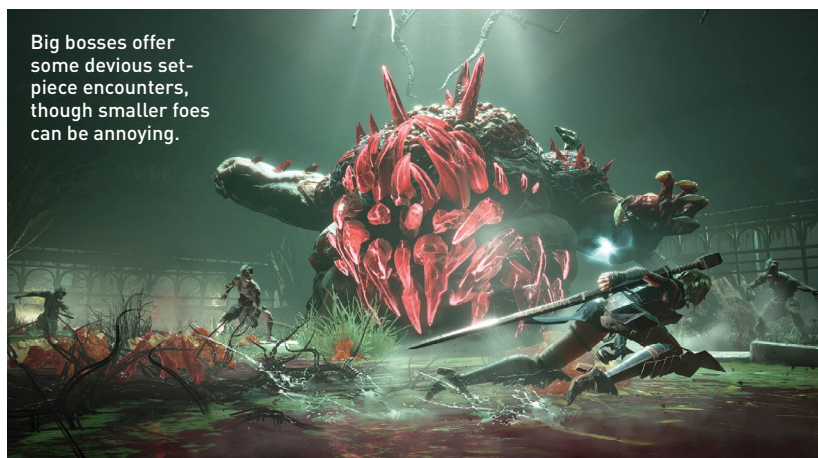
While the game's appeal is almost retro, that's no bad thing. When the heavy music kicks in and we get stuck into enemies, there's an almost joyous simplicity to the action... until we get our teeth kicked in. The action-adventure genre is crowded, but so far the developers of Soulstice seem to get the fundamentals, and are delivering the kind of rollicking action that you don't get so much these days as big-budget games aim for the cinematic rather than the synaptic. The kind of double-A releases Reply Game Studios' work on is a space you should jump into.

IMPRESSIONS

There's a throwback sincerity about this character action that appeals, yet it's got enough new tricks to keep things interesting. We're looking forward to putting these siblings to the test.



1 Get kitted up for the occasion and switch to the right weapon for the job. Some might be good against crowds, others at extended air juggles. **2** It might be time to move to the country when a tear in the sky opens above your hometown. This calls for SPF well beyond 50. **3** Ilden might be one city, but it has plenty of different environments. **4** Take a bow, Briar, you've earned it. And you've also earned buckets of wraith goo.



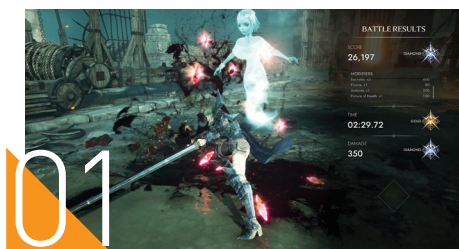
Big bosses offer some devious set-piece encounters, though smaller foes can be annoying.



"WHEN THE HEAVY MUSIC KICKS IN THERE'S AN ALMOST JOYOUS SIMPLICITY TO THE ACTION."

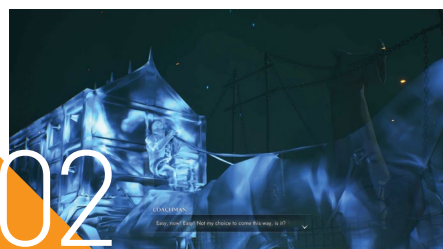
Storming the castle

A fighting tour through the game's first level



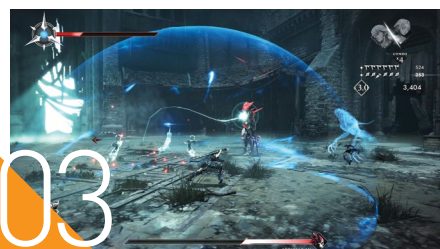
01

Fights start out simple as we get to grips with things, but the enemy variety quickly increases to keep us on our toes. But we love Briar's combat abilities.



02

Lute uses her ghostly powers for some light detective work. It turns out something sketchy might have been going on in Ilden even before the wraiths showed up.



03

Arrowhead puts up a bit of a fight, pushing us to use everything we've learnt so far. Even when we win, he leaves us in peril... a cliffhanger ending to our demo.

Sweden's rally is here, taking snow physics to the next level.

A high-action shot of a rally car, likely a Subaru, driving on a narrow, snow-covered road through a dense forest. The car is kicking up a large cloud of snow and spray. A Swedish flag is visible on a pole to the left of the car. The scene is set in a winter environment with snow-covered trees and ground.

WRC Generations

Usually cleanliness is encouraged at PLAY Towers (looking at you, Nathan Drake's grubby shirt). Except, of course, when it comes to rallying, when we only want to get as dirty as possible. Dropping the numbering, this latest WRC promises to be one for the ages, a transition point from one era to the next mirroring changes in the real sport.

Of course, embracing hybrids requires some big changes to the career mode, which takes into account the differences necessary to manage hybrid cars. You can choose to join an existing team or create your own to rally your way to victory.

All 13 rallies from the 2022 season are present, as you'd expect (joining nine others, for 22 in total). They include Sweden's latest route, which is the first to be entirely covered in snow. Naturally, that means the developers have focused on the physics of everyone's favourite powdery racing surface, ensuring conditions closely resemble those the actual drivers have to deal

"ALL 13 RALLIES FROM THE 2022 SEASON ARE PRESENT."

and now shared, joining local or online multiplayer modes.

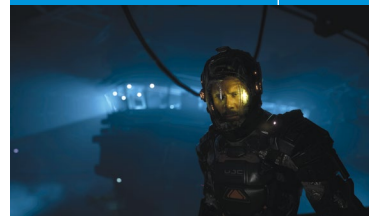
ON THE HORIZON

02
months



i **FORMAT** PS5, PS4
ETA 11 OCT / **PUB** MARVELOUS

04 months



i **FORMAT PS5 / ETA 2 DEC**
PUB KRAFTON

06 months



i **FORMAT PS5 / ETA 24 JAN**
PUB SQUARE ENIX

With a little bit of work, you can bury the hatchet with Sergio – or so it appears.

F FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** TBC / **PUB** ANNAPURNA INTERACTIVE / **DEV** OUTERLOOP GAMES / **PLAYERS** 1

Thirsty Suitors

It's tough being a tall glass of water

When you've got nowhere else, where can you possibly go? Home, for most of us. And in the wake of a messy breakup, that's where Jala heads, to confront the ghosts of relationships past – except here the spectres of years ago are less metaphorical and more solid, hurt humans she needs to face up to.

The feelings this story evokes are grounded and recognisable, from the ache of a commitment that just won't manifest to the crushing weight of family expectations. The presentation, on the other hand, is delightfully out of this world. Almost immediately, Jala is confronted by her ex-grade-school-boyfriend Sergio, who's spent all this time dreaming that she's the one that got away. He won't take 'no' for an answer, and setting him straight becomes an incredibly stylish turn-based fight, complete with flashy special attacks and over-the-top summons.

WITH LOVE

As Sergio tries to entice Jala with stories about his year abroad and rippling biceps, you can choose either to flirt back or to shut him down. This banter peppers the fight, but as compelling an argument as Sergio's chest

hair is, it's very clear this is far from a case of star-crossed lovers. Sergio dishes out his thirst in the form of QTEs, and the quicker you are to react, the more incoming damage you can block.

But you can also wring out Sergio's thirst and use it to your advantage. Using an eyelash-batting Thirst Taunt leaves the open-hearted lad even more

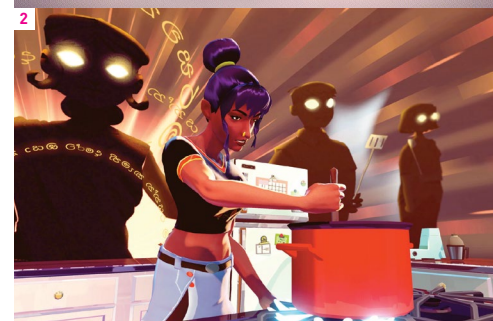
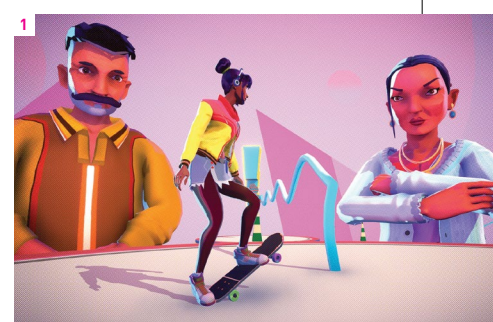
exposed, allowing Jala to follow up with the Suitor Slam skill – but getting the most damage out of this requires matching the rhythm of timed button prompts. Flub too many QTEs like this in a fight and Jala will find herself heartbroken

before long. If you ever find yourself on the ropes, Jala's Dad is ready to swoop in as a summon and pick her up again to fight another day.

IMPRESSIONS

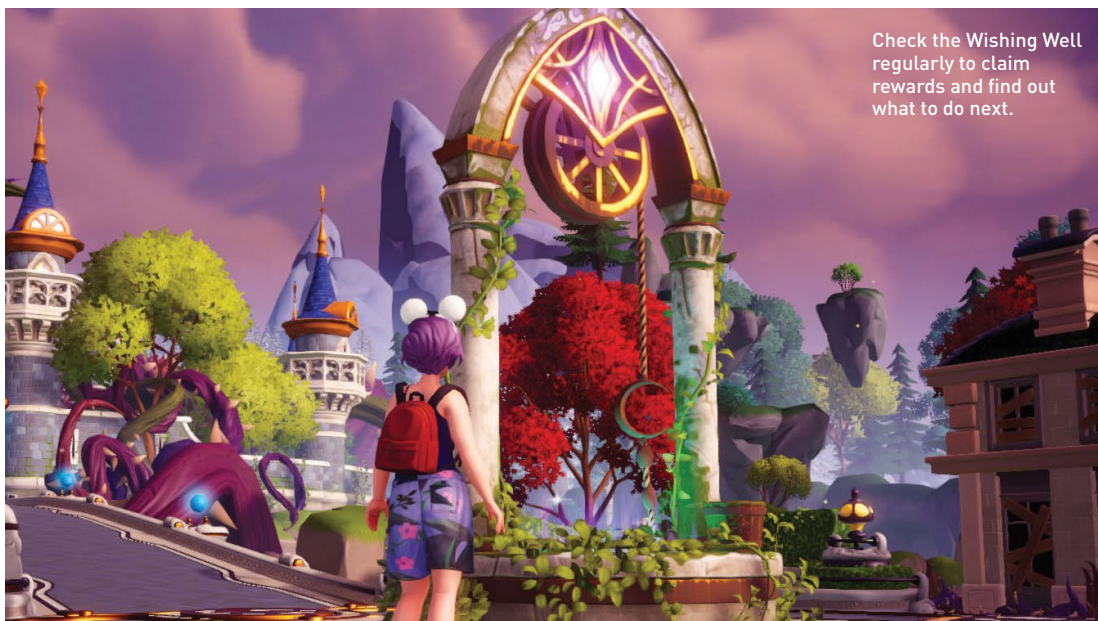
A beautiful melding of stylish storytelling and RPG mechanics. We're head over heels and we can't wait to play more.

"YOU CAN CHOOSE TO FLIRT BACK OR SHUT SERGIO DOWN."



1 Four wheels are essential to exploration, but Jala can't skate away from all her problems.

2 Besides banterous beatdowns, cooking with flair plays a role in patching things up.



Check the Wishing Well regularly to claim rewards and find out what to do next.

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 2023 / PUB GAMELOFT / DEV GAMELOFT / PLAYERS 1

Disney Dreamlight Valley

Dreams really do come true

Disaster has struck your favourite Disney and Pixar characters living in Dreamlight Valley! Their homes have been overrun by Night Thorns, forcing them to flee. The few residents who remain have lost their memories due to The Forgetting. It falls to you to help them out, and for our early hands-on we're answering that call.

There are plenty of characters to meet throughout the Harvest Moon-like valley, yet the experience feels quite personal. The more characters you help, the more you feel the connection between your avatar and these

icons grow. The developers pride themselves on how you're made to feel like you're really living alongside Disney characters and helping them out, and you're likely to run into personal favourites quite early on.

We meet a limited number in our hands-on, but we've got plenty of choice as to how we interact with them. Not only does that stop chatting from feeling repetitive, there are hidden treats for Disney fans. Respond appropriately to a character, and you may get an elated reaction (being praised by Merlin for using Higitus Figitus feels surreal).

REALM WALKER

Realms are mini areas you can visit after unlocking the Dream Castle, each themed around specific characters. Interactions within them are more mission-oriented (for example, you might be asked to find hidden objects), but feel immersive in a different

way to the valley-based life sim component. In our hands-on we meet Maui, who puts us through our paces with a knowledge quiz based on himself, and Moana, who we have to help get back out to her beloved ocean. Do a good enough job of helping out each realm's residents and they'll join your Valley, ripe for making even firmer friends with. Post-release, additional realms will expand the game.

On top of getting your favourite characters to move in, you can make Dreamlight Valley your own, from building your house to creating your own line of clothing with decorations from Disney and Pixar films. When it comes to your avatar there are several options to tweak, such as hair and body shape, to make them unique. In our hands-on with the early build there are plenty of options, but we hope to see even more inclusive design options when the game is released next year. If you can't wait till then, buying the Founders Pack will get you Early Access from 6 September.

IMPRESSIONS

This tantalising glimpse at the worlds to explore and characters to meet show it's well on its way to becoming an enchanting experience should it build on its promise of customisation.

FACTRICK

1. FAR, FAR AWAY

The valley has its own Disney-inspired areas, as well as the smaller, distinct castle realms.

2. EGG-CITEMENT

Not the chocolate kind, but there are tons of Easter eggs from Disney films hidden across each area.

3. PROPER JOB

Once collected, Royal Tools come in useful in your bid to restore each area and can even be upgraded.



- 1 You can have a reel-y good time fishing with Goofy.
- 2 Get creative and make clothes to pay homage to your favourite characters.
- 3 Oh boy, Night Thorns have even infiltrated their houses!
- 4 Within realms you'll work through missions (inspired by adventure games like Monkey Island) to help characters.

TRACK RECORD

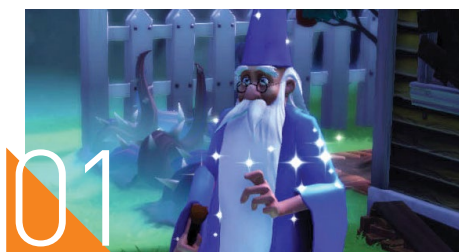
This isn't Gameloft's first time working with Disney. The companies previously paired up to make 2016's character-packed mobile game Disney Kingdoms, and are also working on upcoming racer Disney Speedstorm.



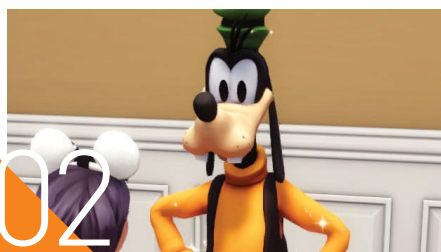
Familiar (and famous) faces



Three magical encounters with beloved characters



01 You get a crash course on magic from none other than Merlin himself to kick off your adventure – the bearded old wizard teaches you how to play.



02 Greet and go fishing with Goofy – the humanoid hound loves it. You can spend hours with him angling for something to sell at his stall, ah-hyuck!



03 What would a Disney game be without Mickey Mouse? As the Valley's gardening enthusiast, he's got green fingers but he misses his Minnie.

Kona II: Brume

You're going to need to wrap up warm for this detective mystery. Brutal cold, frequent blizzards, and vicious wildlife threaten to make every moment a fight for survival as you search for clues in the ruins of a remote mining village.

BRUME ETERNAL

Despite the narrative's status as a direct story sequel, the focus on an original setting and the return of an omniscient narrator, who provides exposition at each stage of your journey, promises to make this a satisfying continuation for returning fans while remaining entirely accessible to newcomers.

With a larger scale, improved visuals, and a promising premise, we have amassed plenty of clues that suggest Kona II is going to be a great sequel.



Anyone else feel like they're being watched? No? Just us? Okay...



F FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 2023 / **PUB** OPEN LAB GAMES
DEV OPEN LAB GAMES / **PLAYERS** 1

Roller Drama

Coach of the derby-villes

Getting your roller derby team to the top takes more than just good tactics on the skating track. You have to foster team spirit even outside matches – you have to put as much thought into keeping these roomies happy at home as demons on their wheels.

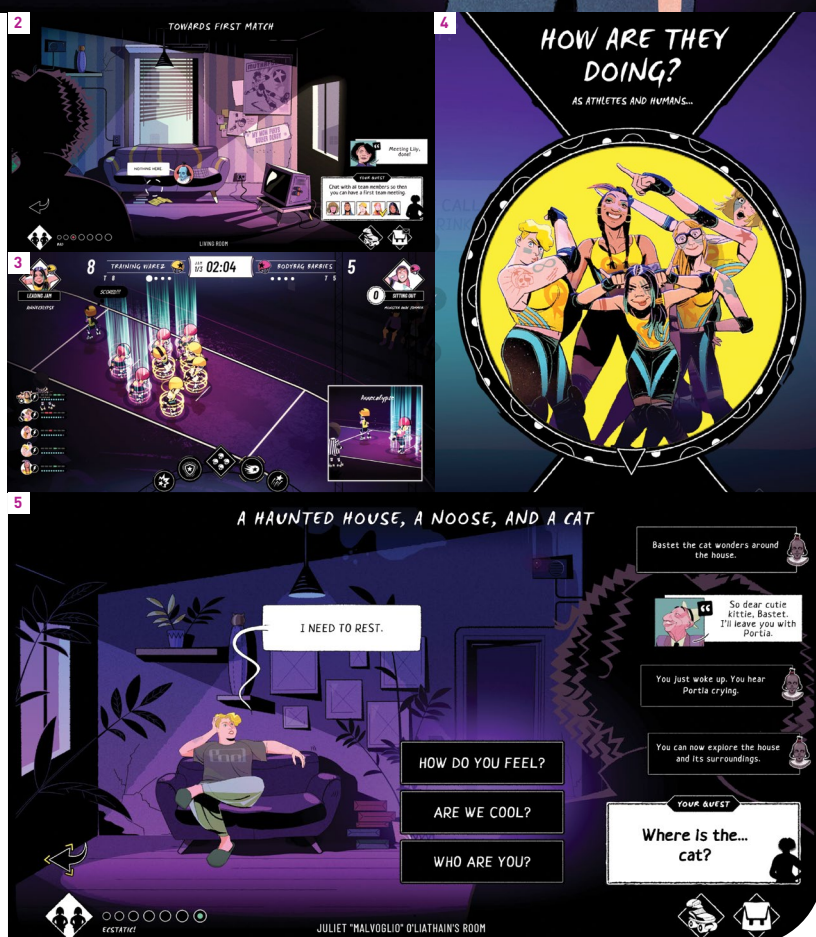
The full-contact roller derby matches have you blending together real-time controls and coming up with strategies as you watch chibi versions of the characters, keeping their stats and abilities in mind. Each championship promises a unique, replayable challenge, and deckbuilding mechanics mean you'll hone randomness into a finely orchestrated set of moves to keep your team's wheels turning.

WHERE THE HEART IS

But you also all live together in one big building. (Some of the players are actually squatting.) As coach, it falls to you to help Anne, Portia, Pippi, Cordelia, and Juliet navigate their personal lives in as drama-free a fashion as possible, while also dealing with the dilapidated building, seen side-on, including literally putting out fires. And we thought we'd had stressful roomies...

IMPRESSIONS

Uniquely blending together sports, narrative, and management elements, this promises to be a fresh and personable tale of your own, well, roller drama.



1 Put on your thinking skates and help them win. **2** Poke around the building to talk with your teammates. **3** The action might be abstract, but still offers excitement. **4** Make sure you check on your friends to keep them in good form... **5** ...though there's only so much time in the day.

■ **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 2023
PUB CAPCOM / **DEV** CAPCOM / **PLAYERS** 1-10

Exoprimal

A reptile dysfunction

The year is 2043, and futuristic exosuit technology is going head-to-head with an ancient threat. We all know about the dangers of climate change, but in this upcoming horde-based shooter the weather forecast is cloudy with a chance of dinosaurs. From what we've seen so far, Exoprimal is part Left 4 Dead, part Dino Crisis, and all fun.

Taking part in a military exercise managed by Leviathan, a malevolent AI combat researcher, two teams don powerful mech armour and race to complete objectives while battling hordes of deadly dinos. It's hard not to chuckle at the sight of hundreds of raptors spewing from portals in the sky like some kind of ferocious fluid, but these prehistoric predators are not to be underestimated. The deadly mutated 'neosaurs' are bolstered with laser and gas weapons, while familiar sights like the towering triceratops and aggressive

ankylosaurus (the ones with big smashy tails) become fearsome minibosses with formidable health pools and devastating attacks.

'SAUR LOSERS

Although the beta build offers only a small taste of the types of missions and NPC enemies you'll encounter in the full game, the looming threat of the opposing team proves more than enough to keep you on your toes. As you vie to fulfil mission goals in the fastest possible time, your human adversaries can interfere with your progress towards certain objectives and even engage in full PvP combat at times. Fortunately you have a range of powerful exosuits at your disposal.

Divided into three distinct classes (assault, tank, and support), each

exosuit has its own unique abilities and weapons catered towards a specific

playstyle. Fans of hack-and-slash action will naturally be drawn to the lightweight Zephyr, which is designed for speed and close-quarters combat, while someone looking for a more traditional shooter experience will feel right at home with the assault rifles of the aptly-named Deadeye suit. You can also switch exosuits on the fly, keeping matches moving at a rapid pace and making it easy to adapt to oncoming enemies and tweak team

composition when needed.

IMPRESSIONS

The wacky premise has potential for frantic fun. It's still early days, however, and whether the exosuit mechanics and PvP elements will be enough to maintain long-term interest has yet to be seen.

FACTRICK

1. TELLING TALES

There's no conventional single-player campaign, but story segments can be unlocked.

2. BIG BOY

The largest suit we've seen so far has been the Roadblock, a hulking mech with a giant energy shield.

3. COMMON ENEMIES

While PvP encounters are frequent, sometimes teaming up to fight the dinos is the only path to survival.



This hails from the studio that made the beloved Dino Crisis and is built on the powerful RE Engine used for recent Resident Evils – Capcom's got all the tools to make a fantastic dinosaur-fighting experience, so our hopes are high.

"NEOSAURS ARE BOLSTERED
WITH LASER AND GAS WEAPONS."



FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA SEP / PUB EA / DEV EA VANCOUVER / PLAYERS 1-22 (1-4 OFFLINE)

FIFA 23

Come on baby, do the Hypermotion

EA's 30th FIFA game was assured of historic status long before **PLAY** landed in Vancouver for a behind-closed-doors hands-on. This time next year the FIFA licence will be in the hands of a different developer, while the mega-publisher prepares to launch EA Sports FC. Happily, and perhaps surprisingly, the team has grander ambitions than merely paying homage to the past.

The FIFA games' connection to the World Cup goes back almost as far as the series itself, but never before

have both men's and women's competitions featured. That changes this year, with both Qatar 2022 and Australia/New Zealand 2023 fully integrated. Kits, balls, stadia, fireworks displays you'll skip after the first group match: you know the score. Even bigger in terms of inclusivity is the addition of women's club teams. The English WSL and French D1F get the same treatment as those World Cups, capitalising on the success of the recent Euros.

Fascinatingly, the all-female clashes deliver the most fun in our hands-on. There are still good players on show, such as England quarter-final heroine Ella Toone, but without 99-rated pace merchants and overpowered dribble kings matches feel

tactical and cerebral. Defences must be skilfully unpicked, rather than raced behind. Sadly, there are still no plans for an all-woman Ultimate Team, but this nonetheless feels like the year where women's teams find an even footing.

Which is not to say that the men's game is joyless. Indeed, both categories benefit from EA's 'Hypermotion 2' tech, which saw the studio mo-cap two complete matches (one men's, one women's) then drop 6,000 fresh animations into the engine. The improvement's most notable in close-quarters play. Dribbling feels tighter, defenders miss blocks, large strikers out-jump keepers (who, mercy be, are no longer superhuman), and new hard sliding tackles see the ball ping upfield or out of play.

IN A SPIN

Not all the fresh elements sing. Set-pieces have been entirely reconfigured, with you moving a cursor over the ball before taking a corner or free kick, to specify where you wish to strike it. This approach worked brilliantly in Blade Interactive's snooker games, but in

a sport based on grass rather than baize it feels try-hard. Free kicks were difficult in FIFA 22, but a simpler fix would have been to dilute keepers' ability to spring for the top corner. The mechanics themselves, as with corners, were fine.

Power shots are going to be this year's love/hate addition, and the one likely to be pushed hardest by the meta. Hold **R1** and **R2** as you bear down on goal and the camera zooms towards your player. Then press and release the shoot button, and you cannon a shot goalwards. It's massively satisfying when you find the top corner, but the risk/reward element comes from the mechanic being unassisted. Direct your shot too early and you're more likely to strike corner flag than onion bag.

It's the most arcade-y addition in years, but creative director Kantcho Duskov insists realism is unaffected. "We always try to make FIFA authentic – that's what we love," he tells **PLAY**. "But we also know it's a game. It has to be fun. So we introduced power shots because we'd watch real football and see screamers going in from outside the box, but those types of goals weren't happening in FIFA. This new mechanic feels so good because you have to think about your aim and the

space around you – and there's a huge variety in outcomes too."

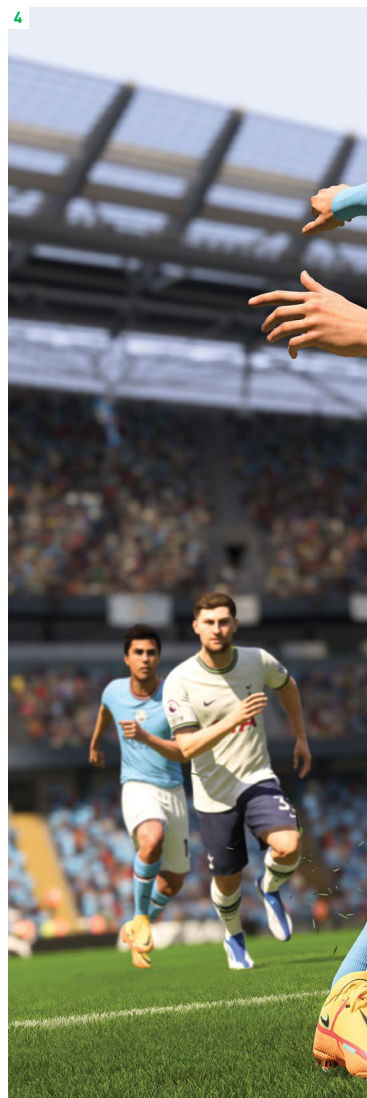
There's no official word yet on the most-anticipated change: a

long-rumoured

overhaul of Ultimate Team chemistry, with inter-team links done away with. But we're told it's coming. Expect more news soon, as EA seeks to bid farewell to FIFA by teasing even bigger things from its successor.

IMPRESSIONS

There's lots to encourage, but those who want FIFA reworked from scratch are still going to rebel. Careful what you wish for: Konami took that approach with PES, resulting in the abysmal eFootball.



4 Three different acceleration styles mean rapid attackers truly burst away from their markers.

5 Even the grass physics have been upgraded, with torn turf staying that way for an entire match.

6 Successor EA Sports FC has already secured Manchester City, Liverpool, and Real Madrid from 2023 onwards. And, er, Spurs.



EA's Vancouver arm opened as Distinctive Software in 1983, and EA bought it in 1991. The studio has been making FIFA titles for three decades. It's also home to the UFC and NHL series, making it one of EA's most profitable studios.



1 Three French women's teams have no men's equivalent: Issy, Soyaux, and FC Fleury 91. Parfait. **2** Sam Kerr is the first female cover star, fronting the Ultimate Edition with Kylian Mbappe, and the Australasian standard edition. **3** Tighter dribbling animations are one of the more prominent benefits of HyperMotion 2.



Labyrinth Of Galleria: The Moon Society

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** EARLY 2023 / **PUB** NIS AMERICA
DEV NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE / **PLAYERS** 1

The great and powerful witch Madame Marta has caught wind of one hell of a score. Alas, it lies within the many twists and turns of an underground labyrinth riddled with monsters and Madame Marta just can't face dealing with all that dangerous spelunking herself. Instead she, along with her assistant Eureka, summons an obedient wandering spirit to secure the goodies on her behalf – you. You're tasked with leading the grand magical dame's puppet army into the depths and retrieving these much-sought-after treasures, known as Curios. The game boasts many floors of dungeon-crawling action, and you can take up to 40 customised puppet soldiers into the depths with you – some of which can even be cats.



Let's Sing Presents Abba

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 2022
PUB RAVENSCOURT / **DEV** VOXLER
PLAYERS MULTI

With Eurovision returning to the UK in 2023, you can't blame us for getting nostalgic for the greatest hits of one of its most notable success stories. Waterloo was the winning entry at the 1974 competition hosted in the Brighton Dome, and is still guaranteed to get your folks belting out the lyrics at the slightest provocation all this time later. But ABBA are far from one-hit wonders, following their Eurovision win with a long pop career, and so 30 songs from the band's decade-spanning history join this karaoke game's tracklist. Besides the usual suspects of Dancing Queen, Mamma Mia, and Money, Money, Money, that will also include a track from the group's 2021 album Voyage.



Them's Fightin' Herds

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** AUTUMN 2022 / **PUB** MODUS GAMES
DEV MANE6 INC **PLAYERS** 1-2

Confront the dark, searching gaze of any equine, consider its huge teeth and frankly terrifying hooves, and only one thought will enter your mind: 'Yes, this is a beast capable of great violence.' Well, later this year you'll be able to set your inner wild horse free with this 2D fighter. The roster contains more than just horses, though: deer, bears, and everything but steers are present, all brought to life with characterful designs by My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic creator Lauren Faust. It takes a minute to get your head around fighting with four limbs but once you do there's plenty to dig your hooves into beyond the initial novelty of its farmyard setup. Talk about bucking trends...



Star Trek Prodigy: Supernova

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 14 OCT 2022 / **PUB** OUTRIGHT GAMES, BANDAI NAMCO / **DEV** TESSERA STUDIOS
PLAYERS 1-2

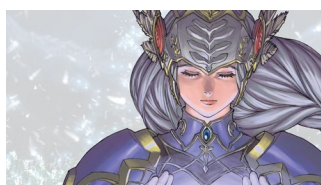
Based on the animated TV adventures of a rag-tag group of teenage aliens who have commandeered a derelict Starfleet vessel (with a hologram Captain Kathryn Janeway along for the ride), you can play this solo or with your first mate in co-op. In it the ship picks up a mysterious signal from a dying star, triggering a series of events that will eventually decide the fate of an entire planetary system. Unfolding across three playable planets, co-stars Dal R'El and Gwyndala search for scattered crewmates while navigating first contact with an unfamiliar alien species. Set your phasers to stun and get ready for some teleporter shenanigans.



Witch On The Holy Night

FORMAT PS4 / **ETA** 8 DEC
PUB ANIPLEX / **DEV** TYPE-MOON
PLAYERS 1

Die-hard visual novel fans are no strangers to visual novel developer Type-Moon despite many of its works having never been officially released in English. Witch On The Holy Night had a Japan-only debut a decade ago; this rerelease finally brings the witchy vibes over here, brought up to date with refreshed visuals and added voice acting. In the perhaps-too-quiet town of Misaki during the 1980s, teenaged Aoko studies sorcery in order to continue protecting the place her family has sworn to defend for generations. Unfortunately, while dealing with a supernaturally animated puppet, a civilian sees Aoko casting spells and the pair become uneasy allies in keeping the secret of magic.

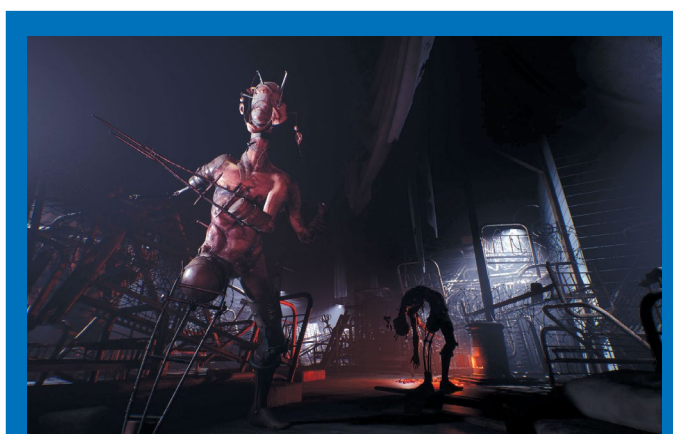


Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 29 SEP
PUB SQUARE ENIX
DEV TRI-ACE, TOSE / **PLAYERS** 1

The PSP port of this classic PS1 JRPG descends from Valhalla onto modern consoles at long last. In it the titular shield goddess is on a deadline as she travels the land searching for tragic heroes to resurrect as Einherjar. But in this lonely world you're always saying goodbye as at least one of your comrades must be sent to fight alongside the Gods at the end of each chapter.

Remembered for its tragic story (given the lead character's job, there are a lot of death scenes) surprisingly deep turn-based battle system, and melancholy tone throughout, this is one legend we look forward to revisiting. We're glad it's been resurrected and we can fight once more!



Ad Infinitum

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 20 APR / **PUB** NACON
DEV HEKATE / **PLAYERS** 1

Torn between duelling realities, you play as a German soldier processing the horror of the Great War. While at home in Berlin, he finds himself endlessly drawn back to the trenches, but these recollections have taken on a monstrous life of their own. In this atmospheric first-person horror, you have to stealthily contend with uncanny entities and strange puzzles alike, while the shifting world reacts to your decisions. Can you find your way through history's darkest shadows?

Warhammer 40,000: Shootas, Blood & Teef

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 20 OCT
PUB ININ GAMES / **DEV** ROGUESIDE
PLAYERS 1-4

Don't ever come between an ork and their hairy squig. In case you're not already knee-deep in Warhammer lore, let us explain: squigs are bitey little critters that fulfil many roles within ork society, even clamping onto an ork's bare bonce to act as a hairpiece. In this chaotic 2D side-scroller, your lean, green protagonist shoots through hive city Luteus Prime in a bid to stave off a bad hair day. There are hats to unlock by beating big bad bosses, explosions to fill your screen, and even a banging heavy metal soundtrack composed by Deon van Heerden that's fit to windmill furiously to.



■ **FORMAT** PS5, PS4 **ETA** 28 OCT **PUB** ACTIVISION
DEV INFINITY WARD **PLAYERS** MULTI

CHASING A GHOST

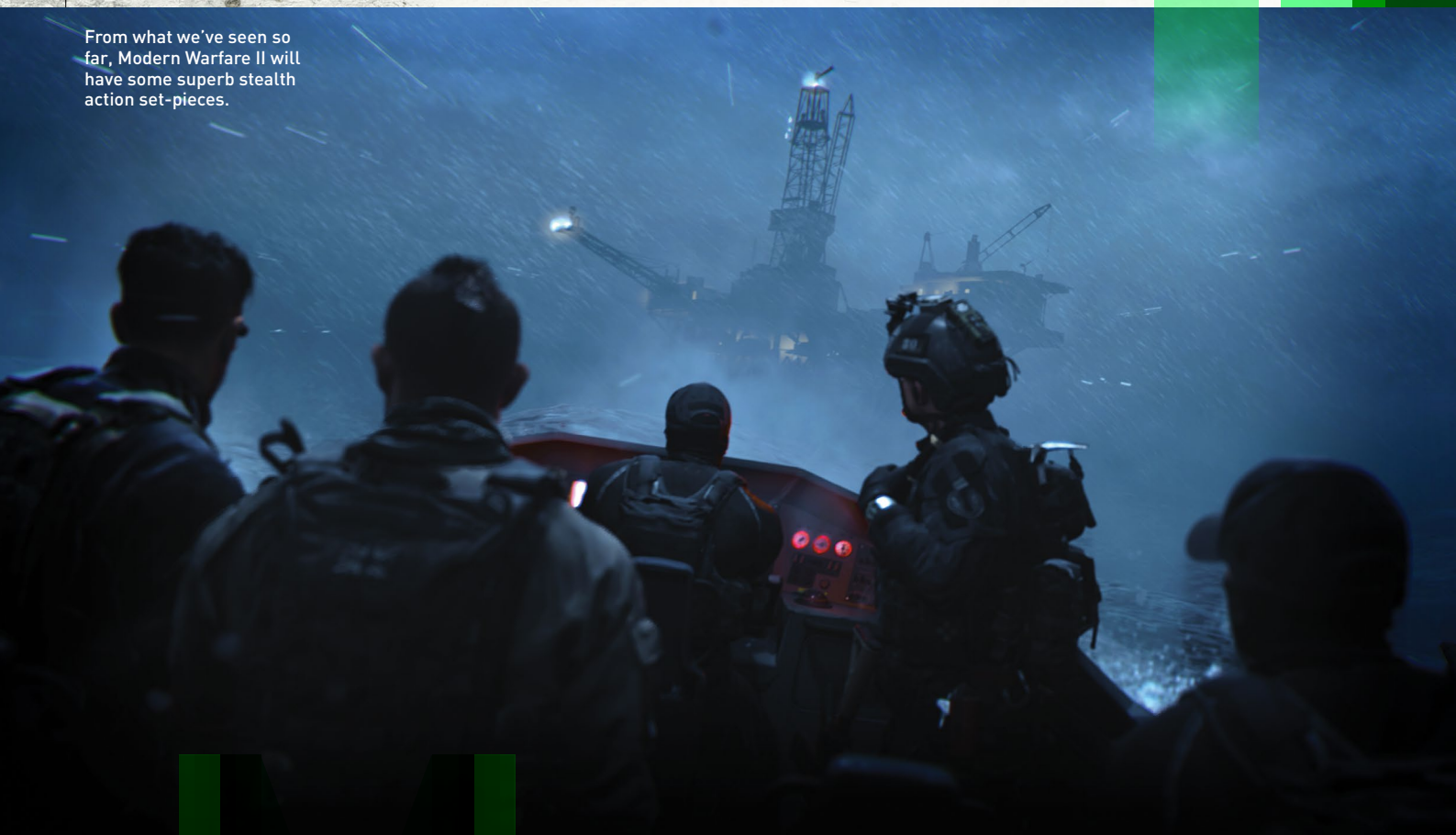
In **Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare II**'s campaign, teamwork is the ultimate weapon. Writer Brian Bloom and director Jeff Negus brief Dashiell Wood on what's to come

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE II



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE II

From what we've seen so far, Modern Warfare II will have some superb stealth action set-pieces.



M

uch has changed since we last saw Task Force 141. We witnessed the formation of this fledgling unit in the final moments of Modern Warfare's post-credit scene; now the central characters of Modern Warfare II are scattered on deployments across the world.

However, with the world under threat from an alliance of enemies more dangerous than anything we've seen before, this single-player campaign makes it clear that squadding up is the only way to

survive. It's a spiritual successor to 2009's much-loved Modern Warfare 2; a cast of familiar faces and a few notable newcomers are gearing up for a fresh globetrotting adventure.

SUITED AND (RE)BOOTED

It's been three years since the end of Modern Warfare, both within the in-game narrative and in the real world. "Aside from flashbacks, and other things where we let you know there's been a temporal shift, we respect the passage of time," explains Brian Bloom, who, as the writer of both Modern Warfare and its upcoming sequel, has been instrumental in shaping the direction the series has taken so far. "We thought, what's happening three years later? How is

"Rebooting the universe gave us an opportunity, but also a really interesting conundrum that we've had some fun with," he continues, "which is to think about how to repurpose certain names, certain factions, certain characters, how to confound expectation on who they might be if you see them, but also deliver to a certain extent on expectations. We're playing with those faders on the narrative mixing board here."

Series newbies and lapsed fans won't need to worry too much about whether they've played the original Modern Warfare trilogy or the recent reboot, as the plot of this entry is designed to be as accessible as possible to new players. "It might be a

good spot to mention that this, like the original or like [Modern Warfare] 2019, is a reimagining of the series," adds Jeff Negus, the game's director at Infinity

"REBOOTING THE UNIVERSE GAVE US AN OPPORTUNITY, BUT ALSO A REALLY INTERESTING CONUNDRUM THAT WE'VE HAD SOME FUN WITH."

that team? How are those characters? How have those people come together, split up, and moved around the world and deployed?

Ward. "It isn't a sequel to one of the older games, it isn't trying to be." That's not to say fans of the series won't notice any callbacks to the

ALL FOR 141, 141 FOR ALL!

From Task Force 141 and beyond, some of our Modern Warfare II squad reports in



KYLE 'GAZ' GARRICK

One of the trio of playable protagonists in the first Modern Warfare, we see Sergeant Garrick (or Gaz for short) picked up by Captain Price during the events of the campaign. As one of the youngest members of 141, Gaz has plenty to prove.



SIMON 'GHOST' RILEY

With a past shrouded in mystery and a face shrouded by a creepy skull-faced mask, this menacing member is better known by his alias, Ghost. An expert in covert operations, Ghost is a perfect pick if you need something done undetected.



JOHN PRICE

When it comes to both combat and facial hair, Captain Price is second to none. A soldier since his teens, a member of the SAS, and the original founder of Task Force 141, Price has played a central role in every incarnation of the series so far.



JOHN 'SOAP' MACTAVISH

Although he was notably absent from the narrative of Modern Warfare 2019, we know from playing past games that MacTavish is one of the best. We can only assume he gained the unusual nickname 'Soap' for his squeaky-clean combat record.



ALEJANDRO VARGAS

Joining the team from Los Vaqueros, a specialist unit within Mexican special forces, Vargas isn't technically a member of 141, but that doesn't mean that we won't be seeing plenty of him and his squadmates during Modern Warfare II's campaign.



1 2

previous games, though. “This is a sequel to 2019,” he says, “and we have this cool opportunity to reimagine elements of the series in new ways and different ways.”

“This was a conscious choice as well, to make sure that the first game wasn’t something that you needed to have experienced in order to get a lot out of this,” he continues. “There are things that will enhance, in certain ways I think, the story if you have played [Modern Warfare] 2019 as you will have spent more time with these characters and know what they’ve gone through [...] but it definitely isn’t a prerequisite to having a great time with this new game and understanding things and getting a lot out of it narratively.”

BACK IN ACTION

The original Modern Warfare 2’s campaign is fondly remembered by both critics and series fans, so we are eager to find out how this entry will build upon the story of its spiritual predecessor. “We know that the audience has grown and also evolved, and that what flew and what was



3

accepted and what was loved is all absolutely valid,” Bloom explains, “but there’s an opportunity to take some characters that had a little bit more of a decidedly two-dimensional presentation at the time, and yet still became legendary, and add more of a spectrum, more dimensions to who they are.”

He highlights the example of Ghost, saying “I think everybody would agree he’s a man of few words, a lone wolf. You might gather that he

1 These funky night vision goggles could give Sam Fisher a run for his money. 2 The members of Task Force 141 are spread out across the world in smaller fireteams when we catch back up with them. What brings them together again? 3 With the focus on Ghost this time around, covert operations could be a big focus of the campaign.

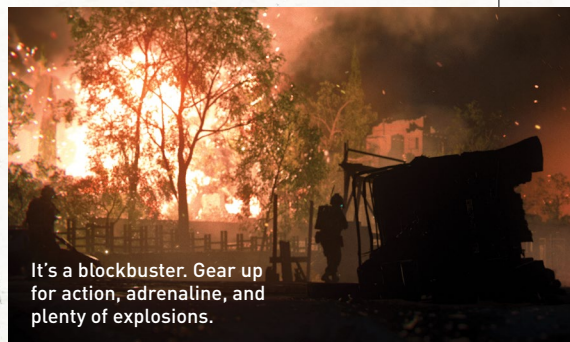
likes to work alone, although he never really said that, and you might think ‘Well, what are the characteristics or traits that would be associated with the man behind the mask?’ [...] If you



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE II

believe that story is character and character is story, which I think we do, you will wholeheartedly embrace that. So you've got a guy who's a lone wolf, who is now part of a team. What affects what his mindset, ideology, approach to tactics, and strategies have on that team? [...] We worked using some of those elements and kind of put them in the pot and cooked them up."

"It's so important to reimagine these characters and make them more



It's a blockbuster. Gear up for action, adrenaline, and plenty of explosions.

"THEY GAVE ME THE NAME OF AN INDIVIDUAL, AND I CAN'T TELL YOU WHO HE IS, BECAUSE IF I DID HE'D KILL ME, BUT THEY GAVE ME THAT NAME."

three-dimensional and update them for an audience that's grown not only in size, but also in what they're expecting out of a triple-A videogame," adds Negus. "Another piece of that, when it comes to the series, as we did in [Modern Warfare] 2019, is to add new characters in addition to those old ones, and build out a different world that wasn't

explored before – both locationally and emotionally. That comes from new people, new faces, and not just resting on our laurels in terms of taking from the brand that's already been created."

One of these new characters is Alejandro Vargas, an elite member of a Mexican special forces unit known as Los Vaqueros, who will



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE II



» accompany 141 through parts of the campaign. Vargas' exact role in the game's narrative has been subject to much speculation. "It's interesting that some people do think that he's a new member of 141. I think to clarify this character is not a new member of 141. He's very much a member of the special forces in Mexico," says Bloom.

"I think what makes him even more interesting than just being another member of 141 [...] is that he grows from his own environment and continues to prosecute targets in his own world. We had an opportunity here to say, 'Well, if 141 [...] needed help, and the story took us to [Mexico], who would they call for help? Alejandro is that first person and so are his Los Vaqueros and his second-in-command Rudolpho. [...] We didn't want to have 141 come down to Mexico and solve everybody else's problems and be the saviour. [They] were looking to find a saviour there for *them*. And I think that's a

1 Could wearing sunglasses on top of a face-covering mask become the new cool? We say yes. **2** The light from fires and explosions will look fantastic on PS5. **3** With updated visuals, fan-favourite characters, like Gaz here, have never looked better. **4** Modern Warfare has always been a global series. We're expecting to see lots of new locations this time around.

sort of a different positioning that we haven't seen a lot of and we were excited to explore that positioning as we developed Alejandro."

THIS IS LAS ALMAS

Anchoring Modern Warfare II's globetrotting narrative is the fictionalised region of Las Almas. "We created this fictional place called Las Almas, the City Of Souls," explains Bloom, "and when Ghost and Soap arrive in Mexico, Soap says, 'I've never been to Mexico.' He tells Alejandro and Alejandro goes out of his way to tell them, 'This isn't Mexico, this is Las Almas.' So he

becomes our kind of reliable narrator on this journey into a new place that has its own rules and its own set of problems and its own challenges."

Much like the presentation of Urzikstan in Modern Warfare, the team were careful to ground their depiction of fictionalised cultures in real-world research. "We're sensitive to the cultures. We're excited to look at the cultures. We're excited to look at the places. So as we're doing our research for some of the Mexican elements of the story we were in touch with the DEA and Mexican special forces. We had a contact and I thought, let's start with exactly where



141 would have started and ask 'If you had to get into a foxhole in this area of the world, who would it be with?' They gave me the name of an individual, and I can't tell you who he is, because if I did he'd kill me, but they gave me that name and I got in touch with this person and interviewed them for countless hours.

"I learned about who they were and what they were up against, what their successes and failures and challenges were, their colloquialisms and language and all kinds of things." Vargas isn't a copy, however. Bloom is careful to clarify that "we didn't base Alejandro on this person, but a lot of the DNA and some of the first principal aspects of creating the character came from that research. We work with language experts and there are so many technical advisors that we're fortunate to have at our fingertips here."

AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE

Mexico won't be the only country we're visiting, however. "Part of the

DNA of Modern Warfare is that we're in lots of different places," says Negus, "so I think this game thematically is about unholy alliances and that means it could be several different places all over the world."

At its core, the campaign's narrative is going to be a story of teamwork, with the team coming

"I THINK THIS GAME THEMATICALLY IS ABOUT UNHOLY ALLIANCES."

together to survive. "Ghost, being that lone wolf, will learn across the arc of this story that he can't do everything alone," adds Bloom. He clarifies: "In the same way that our enemies may get together to defeat us, our allies get together. So in the way that 141 is working with Alejandro and the Mexican special forces, some of our antagonists in this story are also plussing up in order to win."

In terms of the force we'll face, "It has a lot to do with the conscription of people in different areas on the other

side, and this idea of good and bad characters," says Negus. "We still have a good amount of the original theme that war is grey and that there are hard choices to be made."

However, the story's focus remains predominantly on its central characters. "Rather than trying to find ways to shock the audience, we're trying to find ways to pull in the audience and make them a part of the conflict between the characters emotionally. Emotionally, what these characters are going

through is much more interesting to us than shocking the audience."

There's still much we don't know about the campaign of Modern Warfare II, and Negus reiterates that "we really want to try to subvert as much as we can. Take what people like about [earlier games], but also maybe change them around so that what you're expecting might not be the same thing. Lean into who these people are and create something different." We look forward to being surprised this October. ■

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THE BAD,



STARRING

**STREET FIGHTER,
MORTAL KOMBAT, RESIDENT EVIL,
YAKUZA: LIKE A DRAGON, & DETENTION**

058 | **PLAY**



AND THE UGLY

STARRING

MONSTER HUNTER,
RATCHET & CLANK, NEED FOR SPEED,
DOOM, & ASSASSIN'S CREED

Gaming has always had a notoriously awkward relationship with film, whether through less-than-stellar tie-in games for tentpole films or film adaptations that are panned

by critics and fans alike. Change is in the air though, with two of the highest-grossing films of 2022 starring Sonic and Nathan Drake.

The establishing of PlayStation Productions shows Sony's commitment to creating for the big screen. Most recently it co-produced Uncharted, but

it also has a Ghost Of Tsushima adaptation in the works, plus a TV series of The Last Of Us. With adaptations of Minecraft and Metal Gear Solid also on the horizon, the future is promising. But for now, we're taking a look at the most notable films of games – for better and worse. »

THE GOOD

An ever-improving understanding of how to turn videogames into cinematic entertainment has finally resulted in some true movie classics. Here are the best

Seasoned comedy chops make *Werewolves Within* a riot, even if you'll probably forget it's based on a Ubisoft game.



WEREWOLVES WITHIN

YEAR 2021 / **CERT** 15 / **RUNTIME** 97 MINS / **DIRECTOR** JOSH RUBEN

Sometimes the best videogame adaptations come from the least likely sources. While you may not have heard of either the game or the movie until now, *Werewolves Within* is a (very) loose adaptation of Ubisoft's PSVR party game of the same name that sees players trying to find a murderous imposter among the group.

The game's medieval setting, with its witches and folklore, is tossed aside and replaced with a snow-swept American small town, filled with suspicion and tension as an outsider attempts to convince its residents to greenlight a new fossil fuel pipeline. While the concept of the original game is mostly brushed

away, the core idea remains: a hidden werewolf is hungry for blood and on the loose.

MOON GLOW

What makes a good whodunnit? A great cast. Forced together in this dangerous situation is a group of unlikely allies, between whom disagreements would be brewing

"THE FILM EXUDES CONFIDENCE, STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN LAUGHS AND SHOCK AND GORE."

even if lives (and the environment) weren't on the line. You have the older conservatives looking for new money from a gas pipe, a millionaire gay couple who moved for the

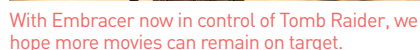
scenery and don't want it destroyed, a hotel owner whose husband left her... They would be at each other's throats (*ahem*) with or without the threat of a werewolf.

It's an audacious concept, but the film exudes confidence, striking a balance between laughs and the occasional moment of shock and gore thanks to sharp editing and dialogue that keeps the movie flowing once the action begins. While it's far from perfect (a lot of time is spent on setting up when it would have been better spent on the mystery), the writer manages to adapt game mechanics into a great premise on which a B-movie sendup can flourish. As far as adaptations go, there's not a lot to dig into – but perhaps that's why it's so successful on its own terms.



YEAR 2022 / **CERT** PG / **RUNTIME** 122 MINS / **DIRECTOR** JEFF FOWLER

moments aplenty. At the same time there are still moments of tenderness between Sonic and Tails, and the former's found family. On top of that there's rollicking action – gotta go fast, after all – that includes some fan-pleasing moments. Striking a balance between reverence for the games and what works for a live-action movie, this sets a high bar and is a great way to welcome a new generation of fans to the blue blur.



F YEAR 2018 / CERT 12A
RUNTIME 118 MINS / **DIRECTOR** ROAR UTHAUG

i YEAR 2010 / CERT 12A
RUNTIME 116 MINS / **DIRECTOR** MIKE NEWELL

Animation enables filmmakers to make closer adaptations than they could in live action.

YEAR 2019 / CERT PG
RUNTIME 102 MINS / DIRECTOR TAKASHI YAMAZAKI

PLAY | 061

No objections here.
This film adaptation
has won over the jury.



ACE ATTORNEY

YEAR 2012 / **CERT** NOT RATED [IMPORT] / **RUNTIME** 134 MINS / **DIRECTOR** TAKASHI MIIKE

Watching Takashi Miike's take on Capcom's famous lawyer, you begin to wonder why we

haven't seen other attempts to bring this courtroom drama to life on screen before or since this movie hit Japanese cinemas ten years ago. Perhaps that's because few filmmakers other than the guy behind Japanese horror classics like *Audition* and *Ichi The Killer* have the larger-than-life attitude needed to bring the absurdity of this world to life.

This is a brave adaption of the entire

first game (apart from the middle case) over two hours, but it all comes together to create a story

firmly focused on the relationship between defence attorney Phoenix

Wright (played by Hiroki Narimiya) and rival prosecutor Miles Edgeworth (Takumi Saito).

HE'S 'WORTH IT

Once childhood friends, they're on opposite sides of the courtroom when the movie begins – though all that changes later on when Edgeworth is himself

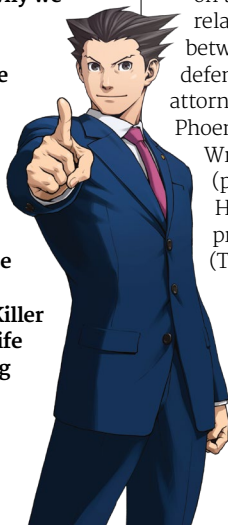
arrested. Which means a lot of development in a short time, ol' Edgy going from ruthless prosecutor

to unlikely ally as Wright ends up helping him find out the truth behind his father's death.

The movie deftly recreates famous scenes

from the game with the gravitas needed to pull them off. The instance when Phoenix cross-interrogates a parrot is arguably funnier here than in the games, as even the actors struggle to keep a straight face in a scene that must have been a nightmare to recreate, yet somehow it all works. Sometimes, sincerity is all you need to adapt a videogame.

"DEFTLY RECREATES FAMOUS SCENES FROM THE GAME."





TAKING INSPIRATION

Plenty of movies take inspiration from games without being full-on adaptations. Though some will make those in the know cringe, some manage to get it right. Here are the biggest



PIXELS

Imagine if being good at videogames could help you save the world. Sounds brilliant? Now imagine that as a painfully unfunny and crass comedy headlined by Adam Sandler, Peter Dinklage, and Josh Gad. Not so brilliant, eh? That's Pixels.



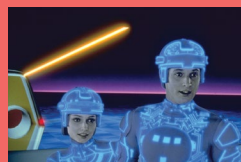
FREE GUY

Taika Waititi and Ryan Reynolds lead a surprisingly funny and charming take on the world of online gaming, as NPC Guy's virtual world faces the risk of server closure – something nobody into games welcomes – thanks to a looming sequel.



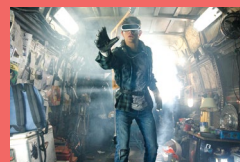
WRECK-IT RALPH

Disney charm turns gaming tropes into a heartwarming message of recognising inner strength, as Ralph's journey from Donkey Kong-style arcade villain to hero sees him help glitch Vanellope (and there are plenty of gaming cameos too).



TRON

Disney was looking towards videogames for movie ideas even in the 1980s, and in this a software engineer gets sucked into a computer. Although some of its ideas feel outdated over 30 years on, those Light Cycles are as cool today as they've ever been.



READY PLAYER ONE

Despite Steven Spielberg's work as a director, this fetch quest about an entitled kid seeking to gain control of the metaverse, littered with pop culture references to push your nostalgia buttons, is saved only by the film releasing before NFTs could make things worse.

FINAL FANTASY: THE SPIRITS WITHIN

YEAR 2001 / **CERT** PG / **RUNTIME** 106 MINS
DIRECTOR HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI, MOTONORI SAKAKIBARA

SquareSoft was ahead of the curve when it came to adapting games into movies, creating its own US animation studio, Square Pictures, in order to turn its properties into feature films. Unfortunately this particular film's failure put a halt to those plans and almost bankrupted the company in the process.

There are hundreds of reasons why it went wrong, a ballooning budget, a story almost unrecognisable from the games, and an intense technical workflow among them. However, taken on its own merit, this film's quite a feat. It pioneered realistic animation and pushed the medium forward, influencing animated movies and science-fiction games alike. It's all covered by a schlocky yet entertaining science-fiction veneer. Even today few films show this much ambition.



Yes, Spirits Within was good, but maybe you had to be vowed in the cinema on release to understand..



The grounded stunts shine here. You book Tom Holland for a reason.

UNCHARTED

YEAR 2022 / **CERT** 12A / **RUNTIME** 116 MINS / **DIRECTOR** RUBEN FLEISCHER

Tom Holland trades in his webshooters for a notebook and a promise in his portrayal of treasure hunter Nathan Drake. On the hunt for a treasure amassed by Ferdinand Magellan, he's also on the trail of his long-lost brother with veteran adventurer Victor Sullivan (Mark Wahlberg... for some reason). Uncharted is an adaptation turning point, the highest-grossing videogame movie ever.

While it's not perfect, there's enough to love here. When the focus is on using Tom Holland's

physicality it really shines, fun choreography in fight scenes evoking the hectic, by-the-seat-of-your-pants chaos of the games.

While the plot is mostly fresh (and an origin story to boot), set-pieces from the games do appear, though they're bogged down by too much CGI. There's also a Papa-John's-set scuffle that takes Uncharted 3's Subway ads to a new level. While it's still eating Indiana Jones' dust, it's a fun adventure flick that jumps after the archaeologist with style nevertheless.

Tomb Raider © Warner Bros. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Square Enix Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time © Disney, Jerry Bruckheimer Films Dragon Quest: Your Story © Shirogumi, Robot Communications, Square Enix, Toho Sonic The Hedgehog 2 © Paramount Pictures, Sega, Marza Animation Planet, Blur Studio Werewolves Within © Ubisoft, Vanishing Angle Ace Attorney © Toho, OLM, Nippon Television Network Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within © Square Pictures, Columbia Pictures, Sony Pictures Uncharted © PlayStation Productions, Columbia Pictures, Atlas Entertainment, A2 Productions Pixels © Columbia Pictures, Happy Madison Productions, 1492 Pictures, LStar Capital, China Film Co., Film Croppers Entertainment Free Guy © Berlanti Productions, 21 Laps Entertainment, Maximum Effort, Lit Entertainment Group, TSG Entertainment Wreck-It Ralph © Disney Tron © Disney, Lisberger-Kushner Productions Ready Player One © Warner Bros. Pictures, Amblin Entertainment, Village Roadshow Pictures, De Line Pictures, Farah Films & Entertainment

THE BAD

Sometimes bad can be fun. For all their flaws, here are a few films that, while not good, hold merit. We respect their effort, and have a good time watching, even if the execution falls short



In a weird sort of return, *Street Fighter: The Movie – The Game* was based upon the movie, coming to PS1 back in 1995.

STREET FIGHTER

YEAR 1994 / **CERT** 12 / **RUNTIME** 102 MINS
DIRECTOR STEVEN E DE SOUZA

Just because a film is bad, doesn't mean it can't also be entertaining. After all, it would be difficult to argue that *Street Fighter*, with its flagrant disregard for the characterisation of the games and comedic acting, is good. But there's an energy and campiness that makes it an entertaining

locations writer and director Steven E de Souza once hoped to direct. Yet in spite of this, the commitment of the film's cast and crew to making realistic fight scenes punctuated by the iconic costumes from the games give *Street Fighter* a charm that's impossible to ignore.

SEE YOU NEXT...

Just look at how the movie's legacy lives on. Lines like Julia's "For

"THERE'S AN ENERGY AND CAMPINESS THAT MAKES IT AN ENTERTAINING EXPERIENCE."

experience, regardless of the technical issues the movie has.

The production was hampered by issues on set, Raul Julia's struggle with stomach cancer during filming – this was his final movie – and other setbacks resulting in a film that was a shell of the James Bond-style adventure in exotic

you, the day Bison graced your village was the most important of your life. But for me... it was Tuesday," are quoted even by people who haven't seen the film. It's become part of pop culture; something some better movies haven't managed. We admit that *Street Fighter* isn't good – but it is incredible fun.

MORTAL KOMBAT

YEAR 2021 / **CERT** 15 / **RUNTIME** 110 MINS
DIRECTOR SIMON MCQUOID

Not every middling fighting game movie can be a campy *Street Fighter*. For an adaptation of a game known for being the harbinger of the moral panic around gaming in the 1990s, and for a series known for its over-the-top violence, the most recent cinematic take on *Mortal*

larger-than-life special moves, which range from vertically-applied buzzsaws to still-beating hearts ripped from people's chests – you'll be cursing at the screen with a grin on your face.

FINISH HIM

This 21st-century reboot is a notable improvement over the 1990s adaptations (the first was directed by Paul WS Anderson, known for his

"THE MOST RECENT CINEMATIC TAKE FEELS TAMER AND DULLER THAN IT SHOULD."

Kombat feels tamer and duller than it should.

But even so, there are reasons to pump in the credits, just like in the arcades. The fighters who come together from across the world to clash are appropriately diverse, and impressive visual effects help sell the series' trademark

work on the *Resident Evil* movies, and the second a commercial failure, ensuring the planned third flick never got made). Yet, even so, for a series with a notable history of controversy, the real fatality here is that even this improved version of the story falls flat more often than not.



Despite delivering on the occasional thrilling fatality, *Mortal Kombat* is ultimately a let-down.



Jovovich proved herself a very watchable action star here, but cautious survival horror this ain't.

RESIDENT EVIL

F YEAR 2002 / **CERT** 15
RUNTIME 100 MINS / **DIRECTOR** PAUL W.S. ANDERSON

Milla Jovovich's red dress is perhaps one of the most memorable costumes in any zombie film, never mind the first film in one of the most successful movie series based on a game ever to hit screens (six films released between 2002 and 2017). The films themselves, well... they could be worse.

The first in the bunch is the best, packing a B-movie charm in its earnest attempt to shift the horror series away from its survival roots into a more action-oriented direction. The brutally violent laser corridor scene is remembered for a reason, as is a leaping kick into a zombie dog's face. Even so, like zombies feasting on a body, it felt torn between two identities, as both an action thriller and an adaptation of the slower-paced game it was based on.

YAKUZA: LIKE A DRAGON

F YEAR 2007 / **CERT** NOT RATED
RUNTIME 110 MINS / **DIRECTOR** TAKASHI MIIKE

Before Takashi Miike struck gold with Ace Attorney, Sega entrusted the prolific Japanese director (who is otherwise no stranger to yakuza-based crime flicks) with the task of bringing its long-running Yakuza series to the screen. That raised an important question: should a movie adaptation attempt to embrace new audiences or reward series superfans? One thing's for certain, courting both audiences can often mean reaching neither.

Even with an original story rather than following the complex plot of one of the games, there's too much shoved in here, though brawls do convey the chaos of a Yakuza fight. Not even a hilariously accurate impersonation of Goro Majima (played by veteran Japanese actor Goro Kishitani) can save a film that just ends up being too convoluted for its own good.



There's decent action and some excellent fights, but this fails to live up to the often-cinematic games.



Certainly spooky, the movie of Detention lacks some of the gut-punch of the game it's based on.

DETENTION

F YEAR 2019 / **CERT** NOT RATED [IMPORT]
RUNTIME 105 MINS / **DIRECTOR** JOHN HSU

Red Candle Games' atmospheric 2D horror game set in 1960s Taiwan during the White Terror period of martial law is a haunting experience that brings the horror of this brutally repressive era in Taiwanese history to life through the lens of the supernatural. The game's success quickly led to a movie adaptation being put into development.

In the end, the movie's failure to capture the terror of the game's approach to the subject matter holds it back. It's far from the worst film on this list and was a major hit in its home country, receiving 12 nominations at the Golden Horse Awards (and winning five) but it's nonetheless a film that doesn't live up to the quality of its source material, the strength of which lay in its interactivity.

FRAME BY FRAME

Dragon Quest isn't the only anime adaptation of a popular game. Here are some more games that made the difficult jump to the big screen in animated form



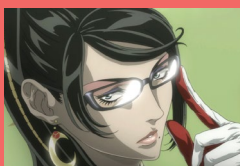
SAKURA WARS: THE ANIMATION

At its peak, steam-mecha series Sakura Wars was an unstoppable force in Japan, spawning everything from stage shows to anime. This 2001 feature adaptation is for diehards only, though, with little to offer those unfamiliar with the series.



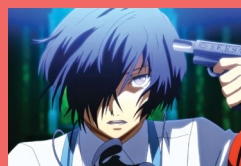
TALES OF VESPERIA: THE FIRST STRIKE

Acting as a prequel to one of the most beloved entries in the Tales series, showing Flynn and Yuri in their early days in the Niren Corps, the decision to tell an all-new story in the original game's world makes this a must-see for fans of these characters.



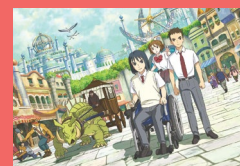
BAYONETTA: BLOODY FATE

A direct adaptation of PlatinumGames' 2009 action masterpiece, Bloody Fate is somehow more over-the-top than the original game. Although it brings nothing new to the series, this is an entertaining romp through the original story.



PERSONA 3: THE MOVIE

Fit Persona into one film? Don't be daft! This four-film adaptation of the PS2 JRPG gives this dense story the necessary time to breathe, providing a more accessible way to engage with this engrossing story for those without 80 hours to burn.



NI NO KUNI

Considering Studio Ghibli's involvement in the original game, a movie adaptation of Ni No Kuni seemed inevitable, as would its success. Yet without Ghibli's involvement and with an all-new story, the movie fails to capture the charm of Level-5's popular JRPG.

Street Fighter © Capcom, Edward R. Pressman Productions, Universal Pictures **Mortal Kombat** © Warner Bros. Pictures, New Line Cinema, Atomic Monsters Productions, Broken Road Productions
Resident Evil © Constantin Film, New Legacy Film **Yakuza** © Sega, ArtPort, CJ Entertainment, Toei **Detention** © Warner Bros. Taiwan, 1 Production Film Co., Filmagic Pictures, Asmik Ace
Sakura Wars: The Animation © Sanzigen & Funimation **Tales Of Vesperia: The First Strike** © Bandai Namco, Production IG, Kadokawa **Bayonetta: Bloody Fate** © Gonzo, Funimation
Persona 3: The Movie © Atlus, Aniplex, A-1 Pictures, AIC ASTA
Ni No Kuni © OLM, Warner Bros., Level-5

THE UGLY

After the credits roll, all we have left of our experiences are memories. Unfortunately, some movie versions of games make us wish that mind-wiping technology was a thing



The monster, armour, and weapon designs are decent, but feel like a waste.

MONSTER HUNTER

YEAR 2020 / CERT 12A / RUNTIME 103 MINS
DIRECTOR PAUL WS ANDERSON

What first comes to mind when you think about

Capcom's long-running monster-bashing series? We doubt it's the US military, but that institution's inclusion in this film is perhaps the first sign that all is not well with Paul WS Anderson's adaptation of *Monster Hunter*.

In fact, the charm of fighting monsters in

attention. Only in the final moments do we meet the Rathalos, or begin to see a modicum of the series' goofier aspects represented, when the cat-like Felynes make a brief cameo.

RATHA-LOSS

An adaptation doesn't need to retain everything about the original games to be a success – in fact, some of the best gaming movies we've mentioned take noticeable liberties

"SHIES AWAY FROM ALMOST EVERYTHING THAT MADE THE SERIES POPULAR."

harsh environments is entirely absent from this disastrous take on the series. Instead, a warhole accidentally sends an elite unit of soldiers into an unknown world where large monsters are everywhere. Then, rather than the focus being on these monsters, Milla Jovovich's Captain Artemis is the centre of

with their source material. But when a filmmaker shies away from almost everything that made the series popular in the first place, they come across as embarrassed by the source material. At that point, what was the point in choosing to adapt a game at all, and why should audiences, game fans or not, care?

RATCHET & CLANK

YEAR 2016 / CERT U / RUNTIME 94 MINS
DIRECTOR KEVIN MUNROE

Sony struck gold with its live-action adaptation of *Uncharted*, but this animated version of one of its most recognisable series (developed by Insomniac Games) is like trying to strike a match underwater: it doesn't work, and you're going to come away with your Lombax tail between your legs.

the screen. Controversy over the choice to change Ratchet's origins into a desire to join the Space Cadets led by Captain Quark aside (and something the series has ignored in its most recent, excellent PS5 instalment), a movie with weapons like the Sheepinator has no right being so boring.

If there's anything positive to be taken from this film, it's that Sony apparently learned its

"A MOVIE WITH WEAPONS LIKE THE SHEEPINATOR HAS NO RIGHT BEING SO BORING."

This is a glaringly ugly slog through the story of the very first game, completely robbed of the joy of interactivity. The series' trademark witty jabs and banter is replaced with a hollow shell, unfolding into one of the blandest takes on a space-travelling adventure to make it to

lesson on adapting its games for the screen. Rainmaker, which produced the movie, was also attached to a now-cancelled Sly Cooper animated outing. It's hard to imagine PlayStation making such a colossal misstep again as it continues its moviemaking journey.



Given the games feel so vibrant, this full adaptation is a little heartbreaking.

THE UWE BOLL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

Ever wondered why gaming movies get a bad rap? Uwe Boll's atrocious 2000s videogame adaptations have a lot to do with this less-than-stellar reputation



HOUSE OF THE DEAD

A masterclass in how not to make a horror movie – or, indeed, any movie. It's based on the games, but not a direct adaptation of one. Discount Halloween costumes result in more realistic zombies than these, and you'll feel like a member of the living dead by the time it's done.



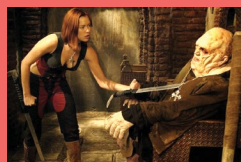
ALONE IN THE DARK

An inspiration to aspiring movie directors everywhere. It turns out that for \$20 million, it's possible to create one of the most incomprehensible, poorly-acted adaptations of a once-popular horror videogame series ever produced for the screen.



IN THE NAME OF THE KING

Based on the Dungeon Siege games and clearly looking to emulate the success of Lord Of The Rings, this fantasy 'epic' will leave you wanting to throw yourself into the pits of Mordor. Panned by critics on release, it was also a commercial failure.



BLOODRAYNE

Perhaps the best of this director's gaming movies, which is hardly saying much. This vampire thriller offers little more than sexist titillation for teenagers, a pale imitation of the action game that inspired it. Star Kristanna Loken also appeared in In The Name Of The King...



FAR CRY

Only one Far Cry had been released when this movie adaptation was made. Even so, turning it into an excellent action adventure should have been simple. Not if you're Uwe Boll, who created something that'll send you to sleep, no tranquiliser bullets necessary.



They might have a 'need for speed', but unfortunately we have a 'need for a better movie'.

NEED FOR SPEED

YEAR 2014 / **CERT** 12A
RUNTIME 130 MINS / **DIRECTOR** SCOTT WAUGH

The Fast And The Furious series appeals to a mass audience because of its sincerity. These are movies about fast cars and family, with a healthy dose of bananas set-pieces that are as much fun to watch as they presumably were for the cast and crew to create. Need For Speed has none of that. While clearly inspired by Fast's success, and despite having multiple games to draw upon, this film lacks everything that gave those films character, instead featuring crass sexism that already felt dated upon its release and has only aged with time. It's not even brainless, high-octane fun, which would at least be something – it's just dull. Crashing and burning from the moment the lights turn green, it finishes in last place.

DOOM

YEAR 2005 / **CERT** 15
RUNTIME 104 MINS / **DIRECTOR** ANDRZEJ BARTKOWIAK

Before The Rock was the movie star we know now, he was a wrestler – as well as the one of the lead actors in a rather terrible adaptation of Doom, playing Sarge. Karl Urban took on the role of Doomguy, here named John 'Reaper' Grimm.

There's a lot of love for the original first-person shooter present in this film. There's even an homage to its gaming origins with a section filmed in first person and designed to look just like the material which inspired it. However, when it's not directly lifting moments from the game for stylistic effect, Doom is engaged in a rather fruitless homage to Alien. At least you can admire The Rock's toned physique while you're bored. And John Carmack said he liked it.



Appropriately this was doomed – the iconic FPS is as gamey as they come, not really ripe for story.



Everything might be permitted, but you know what? We really wish this film hadn't been.

ASSASSIN'S CREED

YEAR 2016 / **CERT** 12A
RUNTIME 115 MINS / **DIRECTOR** JUSTIN KURZEL

Just because a story works within a game, that doesn't mean it'll work in a movie. Some are too complex, some too shallow, some just need to be played. Ubisoft's push into the world of film became clear when plans were announced to adapt its blockbuster Assassin's Creed series for the big screen.

Sadly, this is one of those stories which should remain in an interactive medium. A concept involving a hidden war between Templars and Assassins, with futuristic machines like the Animus giving people in our time a path into memories of the past, becomes too much to condense into one film, and the result is a fractured, confusing mess teasing a film series that in the end never came to be.

Monster Hunter © Constantin Film, AB Digital Pictures, Tencent Pictures, Toho, Sony Pictures Ratchet & Clank © PlayStation Productions, Rainmaker Entertainment, Blockade Entertainment, CNHK Media China, Cinema Management Group Need For Speed © DreamWorks Pictures, Reliance Entertainment, Bandito Brothers, Electronic Arts Doom © John Wells Productions, Di Bonaventura Pictures, Doom Productions, Stilling Films, Babelsberg Film Studio, Reaper Productions, Distant Planet Productions, Andrzej Bartkowiak Films Assassin's Creed © Ubisoft, New Regency Productions, DMC Film, The Kennedy/Marshall Company, 20th Century Fox House Of The Dead © Boll KG Entertainment, Mindfire Entertainment, Sega, Brightlight Pictures, Herold & Besser Studios Alone In The Dark © Boll KG Productions, Herold Productions, Brightlight Pictures, Infogrames Entertainment In The Name Of The King © Boll KG Productions, Herold Productions, Brightlight Pictures Bloodrayne © Boll KG Productions, Brightlight Pictures, Event Films, Herold Productions, Pitchblack Pictures, Romar Entertainment Far Cry © Boll KG Productions, Brightlight Pictures

HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN



URGENT APPEAL



Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine is not just a humanitarian crisis for the Ukrainian people; it's a child protection emergency.

Up to 100,000 children warehoused in Ukraine's vast orphanage system – a network of over 700 buildings – risk being forgotten. Left to face the dangers of war alone as staff flee. As families are torn apart or forced from their homes, many more children are at risk of being separated from the love and protection they desperately need. Worse still, they are at risk of trafficking, or being placed in overcrowded, understaffed and poorly resourced orphanages in border countries.

We must act now.

Born out of the Balkans conflict 30 years ago, we've championed the vital importance of family and community-based care of children and our teams are on the ground in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania to ensure this war does not rob children of the love and protection they need now more than ever. Across all three countries, we're directly supporting displaced families and unaccompanied children with material

and emotional support. We're working closely with authorities to keep families together when they are at their most vulnerable and to fight for the safe tracking, monitoring and care for children without parental care. And we won't stop when the fighting stops.

Will you help us by donating?

With your help, we can avert a child protection crisis of epic proportions and ensure children are protected and kept in families. Never orphanages.

To help protect vulnerable children, donate online at:

www.hopeandhomes.org/donate. Or call **01722 790 111**

Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm.

Please quote **FP22 - G&E** when making your donation.

In the event that funds raised exceed what is needed to deliver Hope and Homes for Children immediate and longer-term response to this crisis, we will use donations where the need is greatest.

HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN



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Tel	Email		

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Reviews



"IT SHOWS LIFE
ISN'T ALL FUN
AND GAMES."

75 *Endling – Extinction
Is Forever*

070 *Stray*

Here's one game you definitely
shouldn't leave on the streets



HIGHLIGHTS

KLONOA PHANTASY REVERIE SERIES **74** | ENDLING – EXTINCTION IS FOREVER **75** | TIME ON FROG ISLAND **76**
FROGUN **78** | SEVERED STEEL **80** | ESCAPE ACADEMY **81** | TWO POINT CAMPUS **82** | HELL PIE **86** | STORY OF
SEASONS: PIONEERS OF OLIVE TOWN **87** | MULTIVERSUS **88** | BRIGHT MEMORY: INFINITE **90**



There's more to this than cat napping. Stray demonstrates in so many ways that it's definitely the life of a cat for us!

Stray

This little kitty is sitting pretty



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4

PRICE £24.99

ETA Out now

PUB Annapurna Interactive

DEV BlueTwelve Studios

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 6-8 hrs

ACCESSIBILITY Controller vibration, HUD, and on-screen jump prompts on/off; look sensitivity and motion blur sliders; invertable X and Y camera control axes; rebinding controls

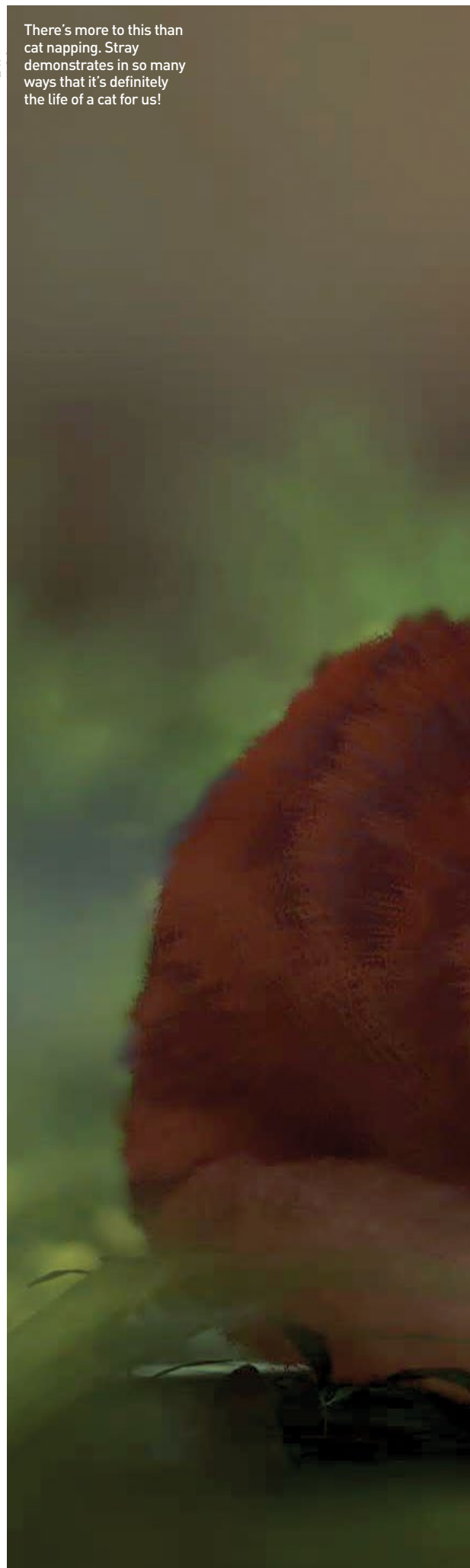


When I was a young 'un, one of my favourite make believe games was pretending I was a cat. Yes, I know, you're ever so surprised – but it's not hard to see the appeal. For one thing, hissing is an efficient way to set boundaries, not to mention you can take long naps whenever and wherever you like, and then there's the terminally clumsy person's simple fantasy of possessing an ounce of feline grace. Internet spelunking suggests not only that my imaginative childhood pastime was far from uncommon, but that there's an evergreen sheen to that daydream.

It's a fantasy that has left pawprints all over BlueTwelve's debut project. You are a feral feline who falls away from the only family you know into a walled city inhabited by robots... and something that skitters in the dark. As a cat, you lack the linguistic ability to communicate with the robo-denizens on your own but you're soon joined by a friendly drone that speaks your language. Called B-12, and looking not dissimilar to a cybernised bubble-eyed goldfish, they quickly become much more than just your interpreter as you search for a way back home.

CAT FOR A DAY

As a cat, your path out of the city is delightfully non-standard. The opening chapter places you in the Dead City, considered the bottom of the pile by many of its robotic inhabitants. The mechanised masses are known as Companions and, in the notable absence of humanity, have fashioned their own language and culture. The ruins of what came before are all around but the Companions have these beautifully realised, post-cataclysmic environments their own. Besides the strong visual direction throughout, one of the most enjoyable



■ For one thing, you can take long naps whenever and wherever you like. ■





1
2



1 Environments range from bustling communities and sleepy villages to terrifying underground passages and atmospheric cityscapes like this one. **2** After getting over the shock of your arrival the robot Companions are extremely welcoming, but they share a city with more than one unfriendly force. **3** This agile kitty survives to tell the tale, but the Zurks and the Sentinels can still cut things short in gameplay if you're not careful.

» nuggets of worldbuilding is discovering which human rituals the Companions have kept up with.

In the *Dead City* you're given the freedom to clamber up objects on and beside walls to survey the city from ramshackle rooftops, pad quietly through narrow streets and confined living spaces alike, or generally be a bit of a menace – in short, to do just as a cat would.

This is far from a traditional platformer, though, with your kitty protagonist effortlessly closing most gaps; wherever you see a void bookended by a ledge or a table or an air conditioner unit marked with ⊗, the cat can make that leap without difficulty. The *Dead City*'s verticality, along with its various nooks and crannies, allows this approach to movement to shine throughout this substantial opening chapter.

Exploration gives you plenty of opportunities to acquaint yourself with the confined community. That ranges from curling up beside a practising street musician to sneaking into the abandoned living quarters of those who last attempted to venture outside the city. Yes, you can be a furry menace too, scratching the furniture or meowing

to distract the locals (⊙ is your dedicated meow button), but this mischief isn't the focus in the same way it is in, say, *Untitled Goose Game*. When all is said and done, *Stray* is much less a 'charming cat simulator,' and more a short but sweet science-fiction adventure.

FELINE FINE

Departing the *Dead City* takes a surprisingly horror-adjacent turn as you finally confront that aforementioned ravenous threat in the dark. Looking like sanded-down versions of *Half-Life*'s headcrabs, the Zurk chew through flesh and metal alike; there's nothing for it but to run or otherwise misdirect these creepy-crawlies in your first few encounters, though you do eventually find a means to fight back. The weapon in question is an extremely limited option, and it's here, when things slow down, that the tension ramps all the way up. It's certainly a memorable finish to your time in the *Dead*

City, so much so that following threats fail to leave quite as lasting an impression.

Instead, the narrative shifts into high gear and races through a selection of equally compelling environments we would've liked to spend a smidge more time in. For instance, the following Ant Village centres on one massive tree thriving amid a mountain of trash. There are plenty of robots to help or otherwise pester, but there's much less to do here, and all too quickly you're moving on to Midtown.

Surveillance is a key theme throughout this next area, as police units patrol the streets and the robo residents' every move is scrutinised by aggressive drones known as Sentinels. Your own movement is restricted as well, as anti-pigeon spikes plague what otherwise would've been vital paw-holds for you. As such, exploration takes a bit of a back seat for the rest of the game, and we do find ourselves missing it as the Sentinels

■ Less a 'charming cat simulator' and more a short but sweet science-fiction adventure. ■



4 B-12's translation makes every conversation look like a comic book panel. **5** B-12's journey may not surprise the genre-savvy, but it'll bring a tear to the eye nonetheless. **6** Lushly realised settings are one of Stray's strengths.



instead introduce a series of stealth sequences. Fortunately, your furry feline's agility is so well realised mechanically that these amount to breezy puzzles, though there's also little to them beyond the typical game of green-light-red-light-or-get-zapped.

HAVING KITTENS

From there Stray runs through rather familiar action-adventure beats – at one point you're even separated from your constant companion B-12 – but just when you think you've sized up this little kitty, it comes out headbutting at your heartstrings. The science-fiction story forming the game's core comes to the fore in Midtown, working to close things on an unexpectedly tragic and touching note. Don't worry, it

never gets too grisly, but the ending has us reaching out to hold our own furry friends close to us all the same – it also left us hankering to rewatch the 2001 anime adaptation of manga artist Osamu Tezuka's Metropolis, but maybe that's us.

Stray makes the most of its choice of protagonist early on, really allowing you to do all the things a typical cat would do, though it eventually loses sight of that in favour of spotlighting the short story. That's no cause for hissing, though it does leave the overall experience feeling somewhat like two kittens from different litters forced together. The combination works better than it should, but we're ultimately left wondering what could've resulted if either half of the game had been given enough space to stand alone.



Cat's out of the bag – we love this! While we would've liked to spend a whisker more time in its world, it's hard to hold a grudge against anything that purrs. Jess Kinghorn

8

PLAY

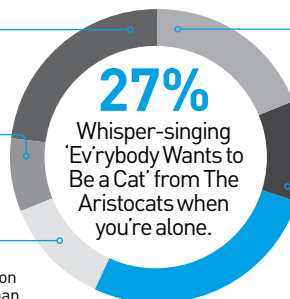
THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: STRAY

23% Scaling the architecture in only the way a cat can and enjoying the view.

8% Legging it so the Zurk don't get their sharp little needle teeth in you.

12% Curling up with a nearby confused Companion for a well-earned nap.



19% Collecting memories and helping B-12 piece their corrupted data drive back together.

11% Showing everyone everything in your inventory just to see what they say.

HOW TO... GET INTO THE HAT SHOP



First, you locate the missing workman – he's sloshed in the back of the bar nearby. After you give him a rude awakening, he returns to work carrying boxes. Wait until no-one's looking, and hop into the box on the ground by the van. He should carry you inside – a loose grate will get you out again.

THE DUALSENSE DIFFERENCE

DUALSENSE SPEAKER

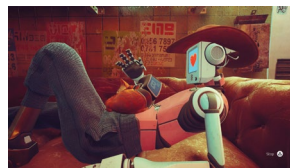
You can meow whenever you like with **○**. A range of cat chirps can be heard from the pad and they're all delightful.



HAPTIC FEEDBACK

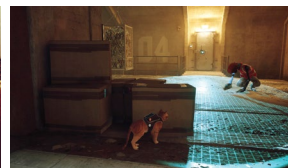
Whenever you have a wee kip or nuzzle up to a companion, the pad feels like you have a tiny purring kitty in your palm.

LOVING/HATING



CAT ABOUT TOWN

From the Companions' colourful murals to the Zurk's dens, Stray's visual identity is really something special.



STEALTH SNOOZE

While they're thematically interesting, the Sentinels simply don't have the same impact as the earlier threat, the Zurk.

TROPHY CABINET

CAT-A-STROPHE



BRONZE

Find the robots playing mahjong in the Ant Village and interrupt their game.

PRODUCTIVE DAY



SILVER

Curl up and snooze for at least an hour – no, really. This is just what a cat would do.

I AM SPEED



GOLD

Get speedrunning: race through the entire game in under two hours.



The second game's boarding sections include rare moments when the action breaks from its sidescrolling confines.

Klonoa Phantasy Reverie Series

A straightforward duo of remasters with platforming charm intact

**INFO**

FORMAT PS5
(reviewed), PS4

PRICE £44.99

ETA Out now

PUB Bandai
Namco

DEV Monkey Craft
PLAYERS 1-2

LENGTH 12 hr

ACCESSIBILITY
Easy difficulty
(new) in both
games

Ah, the double-jump! It's something we take for granted these days. But in earlier platformers it was more akin to a power-up or a skill to learn or earn. When you're in the paws of the dream-travelling Klonoa, to double-jump you pick up enemies, then use them to boost yourself higher. The mechanic made Namco's furry creation stand out, if his peculiar ears didn't already.

These 2.5D games – the first released on PS1 and the sequel on PS2 – might have felt antiquated at a time when games in general were moving towards full 3D, although *Klonoa* wasn't alone in sticking to the older style, coming shortly after the likes of *Pandemonium* and *Spider*. Nonetheless, time has been kind to side-scrollers, especially as transitions to 3D have been less successful (Oh, hi, *Sonic*!). That makes *Phantasy Reverie Series*, a fairly straightforward remaster of *Klonoa: Door To Phantomile* and *Klonoa 2: Lunateea's Veil*, a welcome sight in 2022.

PAINTED VEIL

On the surface, the remaster's simple yet vibrant visuals mean you can't really tell the games were made years apart, especially since the PS2 sequel retains the original's 2.5D platforming style, albeit with more instances of *Klonoa* being thrown

around. Nonetheless, Door To Phantomile is obviously the simpler platformer with just 12 levels across six worlds to traverse, even if some do eventually become more complex, requiring more back-and-forth between areas.

Lunatea's Veil is the stronger entry, with almost double the levels (even if some are just altered versions of earlier levels) plus more interesting puzzles. So while Klonoa can use his wind ring to inflate enemies, then use them as throwable weapons, we also come across an enemy that changes colour when absorbing enemies it's thrown at, which we use to dissolve coloured crystals blocking our path. Better still, it follows the noughties trend of

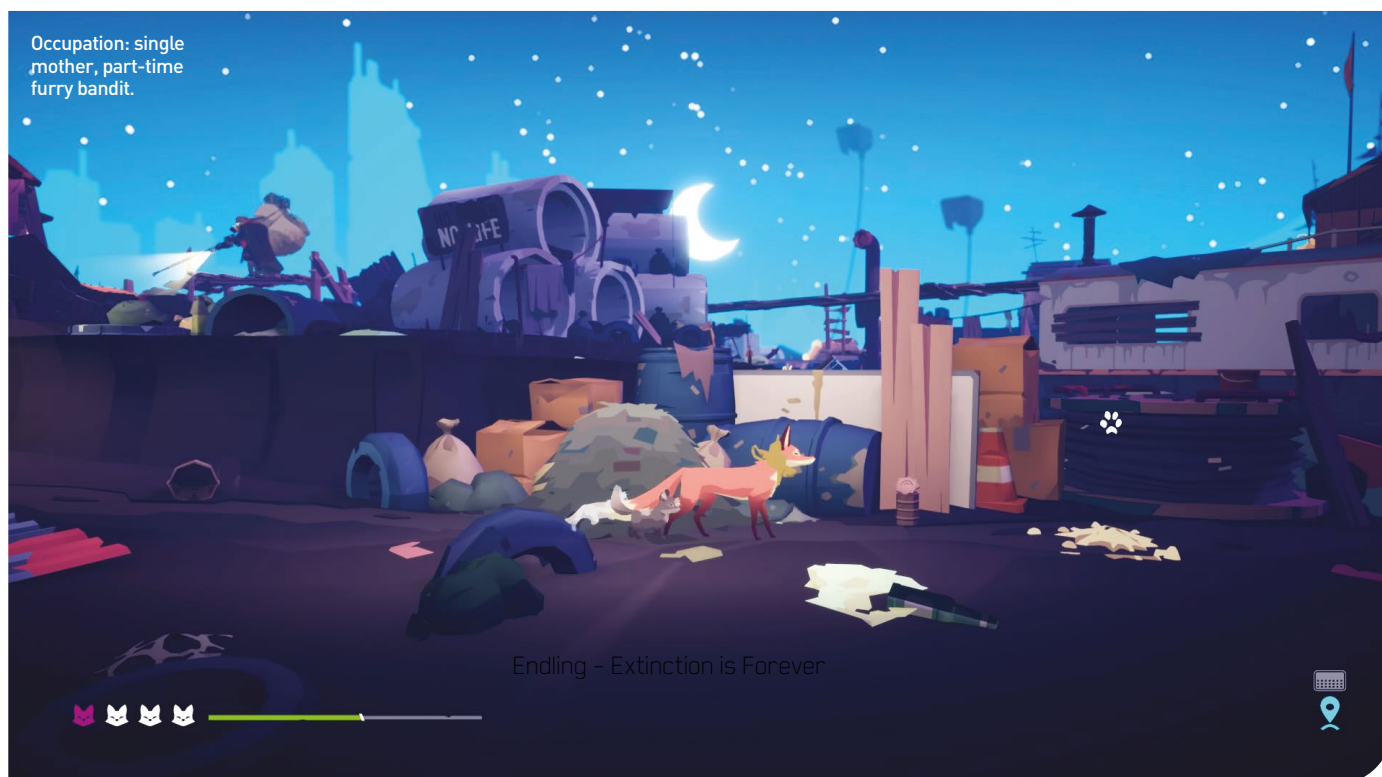
letting you cruise through levels
on a board across water, snow,
sand... all sorts of surfaces!

We could've done without the heavy-handed tutorials (which you can turn off) but other additions, such as auto-save and the ability to fast-forward cutscenes, are welcome. There's also an easy mode to make dream-travelling more relaxing, though it's enough of a challenge just getting all the collectibles. *Klonoa* might not be a household name like *Crash*, and there are the odd annoying bits of platforming that his fluttering can't quite alleviate, yet this is still a wonderful nostalgic escape. Hopefully it will win over more players and perhaps even convince Bandai Namco to make a new one.



A straightforward remaster of two literally straightforward platformers, retaining the childlike wonder and charm, making it a dream for anyone to visit. **Alan Wen**

8
PLAY



Endling – Extinction Is Forever

All the world will be your enemy



INFO

FORMAT PS4

PRICE £24.99

ETA Out now

PUB Handy Games

DEV Herobeat Studios

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 4 hrs

ACCESSIBILITY
Colourblind mode;
camera shake
options; vibration
options; adjustable
brightness;
expanded volume
options

Like watching a film about a dog and knowing it will have a sad ending, you go into a game with environmental themes, such as *Endling*, knowing it's likely to be harrowing. Where *Endling* exceeds the mark is that in addition to telling a beautiful yet bleak story, it's a very solidly made survival game, with some rather effective human-shaped jumpscare. You'll really feel the tension.

Have you ever wondered what it would feel like to play through *Watership Down* or *The Animals Of Farthing Wood*? It turns out being in direct control of the safety of your furry babies is even more stressful than simply spectating. As Earth's last mother fox, you have to scavenge for food, protect your cubs from predators, and attempt to navigate the terrain under the safety of darkness while the survivable world around you changes with both the passing of seasons and the spread of mankind.

The controls are just the right mix of simple and engaging. As well as follow scents, you can sneak up on prey, carry your cubs when they get tired, and pet your cubs, which has the additional benefit of calming them when they get frightened. And there's a lot to be frightened of. Like accidentally getting one of them killed in the first five minutes. Keep them alive and they'll be able to pick up skills like squeezing through gaps and digging up worms that are invaluable when it comes to keeping the family unit together, in life rather than in death.

Surviving is hard enough, but the extra burden of trying to locate one of your missing cubs

expertly tears you between the comfort of the familiar and a tempting scent trail that will lead you into the unknown for who knows how far or how long. If you're lucky, there'll be food along the way before one of your cubs dies of starvation. If you're luckier, you'll notice all the traps that have sprung up before they

Following the trail of your cub unravels a story in images of the man who took him, who is trying to protect his family just as the fox is hers. It wraps the narrative together in a depressing, yet satisfying way and fully drives home the point *Endling* is trying to make. Coexistence between humanity

In addition to telling a beautiful yet bleak story, it's a very solidly made survival game.

get you. You'll need to be wary as you and your cubs share a health bar, and climbing or digging can be hampered by injury.

I WILL SURVIVE

One of the refreshing things about *Endling*'s tale of tragedy is that it shows life isn't fun and games for the humans either.

and nature becomes even more fraught when existence at all is in peril. The fox is not only involved in her own tumultuous fight for survival, but a spectator (and occasional interloper) to humanity driving itself to ruin. It's bleak, but it's effective and carried out in a way that feels natural, not heavy-handed.



A well-crafted survival story that conveys an important message. Emotive music and distinctive visuals blend with strong gameplay for a memorable experience. **Max Williams**



THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: TIME ON FROG ISLAND

8% Earning and spending money. Can't we escape you even here, capitalism?

5% Hurling poor clams around, breaking them open looking for pearls.

12% Talking to giant frogs like it's a totally normal thing to be doing.

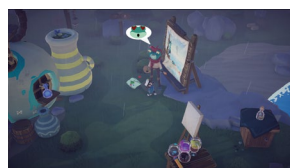
50%

Carrying a comically large object above your head for trade.

15% Finding something new to see, do, or have. Feelings about.

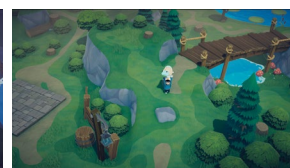
10% Running around, knowing what you want but not where to find it.

LOVING/HATING



FROG DAY AFTERNOON

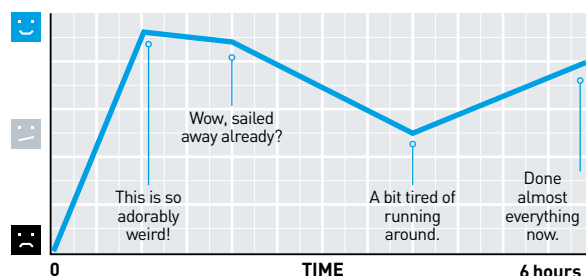
When you bring the amphibian couple together, they become pretty much inseparable. It's absolutely adorable!



RUN RAGGED

The captain's getting plenty of cardio hunting down items to trade, but a way to shorten journeys would be welcome.

COMPEL-O-GRAPH



HOW TO... VISIT THE WESTERN ISLAND



Find the carpenter frog, wearing a fez-like hat. Give them their missing saw (stuck in a tree stump near your starting point). The next day, give them the hammer, which is by a bench in the southeastern corner of the island. After a few days, they'll complete the western bridge!

IS IT BETTER THAN?



YES

Frogger's a classic, sure, but can its road-crossing star run a small business? We think not.



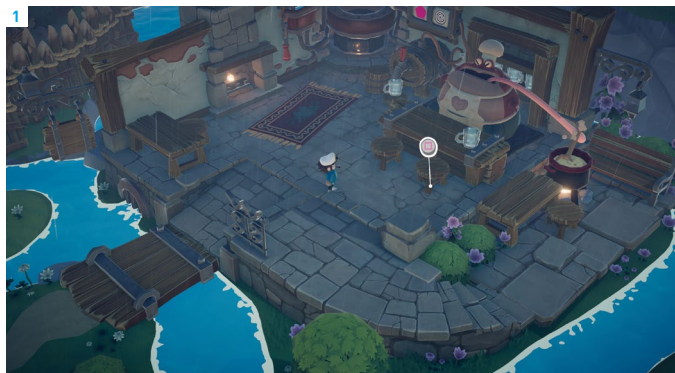
NO

The frog was the real star of the superb What Remains of Edith Finch, which we'll never forget.



YES

Come on, please don't make us justify this. That goes for the sequel to Crazy Frog Racer, too.



1 Brew and drink the right potions and you can fit in, in some interesting ways... 2 The captain's dreams slowly tell the sad backstory to the shipwreck. No, you're crying! 3 You can, if you're feeling cruel, throw dodos off the cliff.



leaving the island, you can put a lot of effort into staying. You can become like the locals in some neat ways, and it's even possible to get yourself a house and a basic garden.

FROG BORUS

However, some of the design choices can irritate. There's a sort of day/night cycle where the frogs all go inside (where you can't follow) and certain actions can't be completed at night. You can only advance to the next day by sleeping at specific locations, which can be annoying if you were in the middle of something. Also, a few puzzles are slightly obscure, and there's just a *little* too much carrying things over great distances in order to make a delivery – and to make that

worse, you can only carry one thing at a time.

Your enjoyment will also depend a little on how good you are at retaining an internal map and sense of direction in virtual environments. Frog Island is fairly small, even if/when you unlock the second part of it. There's no map and no waypoint system, though, so you need to learn your way around. For some people, that's a welcome bonus!

There's plenty here to make you croak with pure delight. Lots of cool little surprises, an almost complete lack of pressure, and we love bringing a froggy couple together – and subsequently seeing the pair of them together whenever we are near their house. It's worth playing for that alone.



Deeper and more surprising than you might expect, yet not quite as tightly designed as you might hope. Still, Time on Frog Island flies, because you're having fun. **Luke Kemp**



The whole game is a visual treat, but the snow sections are particularly easy on the eye.

Not a great hop forward for platformers

The frogun is a zany invention cooked up by Renata's parents, who've gone off to explore some ancient ruins and left the young girl to fend for herself. When, days later, they still haven't returned, Renata opts to go in search of dear old mum and dad. After that barebones plot is established there's not much in the way of story, and what scant narrative there is unfolds only through hidden collectables in the form of diary entries left behind by Renata's folks. While the tale isn't exactly ribbiting, unearthing this trail of paper crumbs plays nicely into the game's treasure hunting theme.

The action takes place in lovingly crafted isometric environments, and there's an impressive variety on offer both in terms of navigational obstacles and visual themes. Things start out in a tropical



○ △ □ × ○ △ □ ×

Your primary means of getting around is the froggun, which works much like a regular firearm, but instead of firing a bullet, pulling the trigger extends your frog friend's sticky tongue, allowing you to zipline across greater distances or pull objects and enemies in your direction. It's an inventive mechanic that elevates the action beyond merely leaping around levels. However, it's also slow and finicky to use, meaning your

Much of the challenge derives from the isometric perspective as it makes judging platform locations and correctly lining up your character rather tricky. This can be overcome with a slow and steady approach, and early levels offer a quirky and enjoyable way to test your platforming prowess. However, later sections will have you hopping mad as the frogun's



- 1 Things get pretty hot in some levels as the floor is literally lava.
- 2 Grabbing enemies and lobbing them at others never gets old.
- 3 Purple skulls are optional treasures earned by completing tricky sections.



clunky nature fails to keep up with the game's increasingly demanding design, in particular when you're forced to use the gadget multiple times in quick succession to cross larger gaps. It's incredibly difficult to line up your next target while in the air, and hooking onto an object requires precision that the game just doesn't allow for when speed is of the essence. This makes the many racing sections equally frustrating. These task you with dashing through a level as fast as you can to beat your NPC rival Jake – and the less said about that speedy little blighter, the better.

CROAK IT

The game performs well for the most part, but there are still some bugs that need squashing.

On multiple occasions during races in our playthrough Jake gets permanently stuck behind a wall or object, and in the middle of one particularly demanding level filled with fiery tornadoes, boulders, and flame-breathing statues, the game repeatedly crashes altogether, forcing us to start over from scratch.

On the surface, Frogun is as adorable as a sneezing kitten. The pixelated environments are crisp and colourful, the tunes delightfully upbeat, and the overall tone wonderfully nostalgic. Although it's initially a jaunty and entertaining excursion, the temperamental nature of your frog companion makes the trickier areas feel like a slog, resulting in a retro-inspired adventure that's more frustrating than fun.

In terms of visuals and tone, Frogun is a delightful tribute to PS1-era platformers, but a clunky core mechanic makes this upbeat adventure fall flat. **Anne-Marie Ostler**

5

PLAY

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: FROGUN

13% Admiring the beautiful visuals and wishing you were back in the days of PS1.

5% Noticing the title's similarity to frogurt and wishing you had some.

2% Repeatedly activating a checkpoint to hear the delightful noise it makes.

60%

Zooming around using a grappling hook that's also a talking frog.

17% Hearing Renata say "Ow!" as she tumbles to her death.

3% Throwing objects at Jake during a race to slow the little punk down.

HOW TO... TOAD-ALLY MASTER LEVELS



To earn 100% completion in a level, you have to finish it with no deaths, snag the hidden treasures, collect every coin, and complete the time trial. This not only gives you bragging rights but also handy health upgrades. And don't worry, it doesn't have to be done all at once.

FRIENDS & ENEMIES



JAKE

Your race rival and the real villain of this tale. He'll give you more trouble than any boss.



HATTER

A bushy-bearded hat salesman; only his nose is visible. Is he mad? We don't know.



KICKY

This bug is fast on his feet, but the mini tornadoes he calls up aren't very sporting.

STATPACK

33

Hat options available. Renata's regular headgear comes in a variety of colours. You can opt for fancier designs, but they're particularly pricey.

60

Seconds is all the time you get for the third level's time trial. To steal a line from Sonic, you gotta go fast – and there's no room for error here.

03

Health points are yours in the beginning. You can upgrade this, but no amount of vitality is going to save you if you go tumbling off a ledge.

TROPHY CABINET



MODEL

BRONZE

Pose for the camera and snap a pic using photo mode. Now say cheese!



COIN COLLECTOR

SILVER

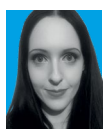
Reach the end of a level, having pocketed every single coin along the way.



PRICKLY SITUATION HANDLER

GOLD

Put the game's first boss in his place to claim this wonderfully shiny prize.





Be aware that, as the intro screen notes, this is not suitable for photosensitive epileptics.

Severed Steel

We're steel playing even though the credits have rolled



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4

PRICE £19.99

ETA Out now

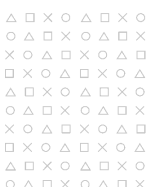
PUB Digerati

DEV Greylock Studio

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 3-4 hrs (campaign)

ACCESSIBILITY Customisable HUD, crosshair, FOV, look sensitivity and controls; motion blur, reduced flash, and screen shake on/off; customisable enemy outlines on/off



We love diving through windows in slow motion, scoring three headshots before hitting the floor, and sliding across the room to take out another two armed men. But enough about what we do at the weekend. Following in the footsteps (across the wall) of *Mirror's Edge* and *Ghostrunner*, this is an FPS that slathers its violence with parkour-flavoured style – yet very much in its own way.

Severed Steel pulls off the trick of cutting the FPS experience down to the bones without feeling in any way shallow or boring. There's a story, but it's only just enough to hold the experience together. There's no speech in-game beyond enemy barks such as "Get her!" The beginning (and sometimes middle) of each stage briefly shows you an objective in big letters, and that's all the instruction you get. Everything else is action, action, action.

The idea is that you need to keep moving – with style. Each environment has plenty of enemies, and it doesn't take much to kill you. However, you're invulnerable while performing 'stunts' (wallrunning, sliding along the floor, or diving through the air) and/or when making use of your limited slow-mo meter. Kills refill health and slow-mo, so if you want to succeed, you not only need to be good at killing people, you need to look good while doing it.

PARKOUR BLIMEY

An added complication is the way weapons work. Every gun, including the one you start a stage with, contains limited ammunition. There's no reloading,

when a gun's empty, you throw it away and need to grab another. You soon get a Mega-Man-style arm cannon, but this has very limited ammo. It can be reloaded, but only from certain enemies. Although you can kick, and steal a weapon when up close, it's best to swap weapons before your current one runs dry.

All of this combines to create an exhilarating experience that makes you feel like a superpowered John Woo hero. Taking out multiple enemies in one brief slow-motion sequence *never* gets old, and churning through several weapons in 60 seconds as you wreak havoc makes you feel unstoppable.

You can usually pick your own route to objectives, especially once you get the cannon.

Levels suit the hectic but fair pace of the game. They're all fairly small, but are never strictly linear. You can usually pick your own route to objectives (especially once you get the cannon, which can blow holes in almost any surface) and you'll often need to circle back around a level to the exit or to a new objective.

Even if, on occasion, the game proves that is not the case.

With the campaign done, there's *Firefight* to keep you hooked. This allows you to play through campaign levels in a score-focused mode that pushes you to unlock starting weapons, cheats, and other modifiers. It's an adrenaline junkie's dream.



A thrilling parkour shooter that's short but oh so sweet, it's FPS action distilled into an instinctive, simple, yet compelling experience. We can't wait for the sequel. **Luke Kemp**





Learn students' personality traits and discover what they'd like to see around campus.



1
2



3

1 Grab your grater and get in goal, it's time for a game of Cheeseball.
2 DJ Sue Chef's on the ones and twos – reach for the lasers! 3 There's more than just toil and trouble in the Potions room – there are rubber ducks too, apparently.

more content, it also counts towards the school's overall rating. Although you may be aiding them in how to avoid CCTV in Spy training, you're sure to feel a sense of pride upon graduation day.

Useful features such as the ability to copy and create template rooms return, but the vibrant art style still takes centre stage; you're now able to customise rooms, floors, decorative items, and clothing. Giving us the option to distinguish assistants and put them in a variety of coloured vests to denote their different roles on site is a subtle addition, but one that really adds to the full experience. Even the smallest tweaks still have a huge impact during gameplay.

CLASS ACT

Simulators on console have often been criticised in the past for having clunky controls, however Two Point Campus bucks the trend. Every single button on the DualSense is utilised, giving you complete control over construction and characters, and ensuring you can cycle through your HUD in a wonderfully smooth manner. The game also features handy speed functions. With **PS**, you're

able to toggle between three different speed settings, while clicking **PS** gives you the power of Bernard's Watch – the sweet stoppage of time. The ability to build and edit on pause is a blessing; it allows you to complete a task without having to simultaneously construct the new Cheeseball field and keep an eye out for faulty machinery. Even a bit of redecorating and remodelling becomes a doddle with time stood still.

We do have a minor gripe: there's no use of haptic feedback, which feels like a missed opportunity. Feeling a thud as you plant a room or a pull of resistance when picking up staff members could've really pushed the experience that little bit further. It's a shame that the DualSense speaker isn't used to elevate announcements either – a Hi-De-Hi!-style glockenspiel would have really been the cherry on the cake.

Earning a star for your university can turn into

something of a slog, especially as the criteria you need to meet chalks up tougher than an Ofsted inspection. However, a gold star gains you a letter of congratulations from Education Minister Tarquin Foxbridge. Not only does ol' Tarkers offer you another campus to make your own, along with additional classes for the curriculum, he also dangles a hefty cheque to make your wallet rumble. A no-brainer, surely?

We soon feel the money burn a hole in our varsity joggers and, after an apparently good-natured warning message, get ourselves into an eye-watering amount of debt from all three loan options available. Look, when you've got students to keep happy, buildings to heat and a \$35,100 VR Lab to construct, you do what you have to do. Plus, those Cheesy Gubbins vending machines we've installed aren't exactly going to pay for themselves.

If you're really careful, you can avoid taking out loans. But

Every single button on the DualSense is utilised, giving you total control over construction.



4 We won't charge you for any breakages – we might raise your tuition, though. **5** Naively, we didn't think the dragon tower would have an actual dragon in it. **6** Proceed with caution; gastronomy class will make you really hungry.



if you're like us and have no problem with robbing Peter to pay Paul, spending extra cash to help you reach your objectives does have benefits. Completing career goals and student requests can earn you serious Kudosh, the in-game currency that enables you to unlock objects. These can be decorative, helping to increase the appeal of your halls, or informative items that help students further their education.

PUN AND GAMES

Every new college has a different theme and traits, plus you gain a new subject when you're able to move to your next college. And much like Two Point Hospital, Two Point Campus doesn't hold back on its puns. It's one of the true highlights that have become a staple of the

series so far. From DJ Sue Chef, who brings the essence of her club 'Beat Root' to the students' union on event nights, to aptly named classes like Knight School, they're sure to bring a giggle as you keep fulfilling those campus wishes.

The announcer makes a welcome homecoming, deadpan announcements and comedic requests echoing around college grounds. Two Point County radio serves as the main soundtrack, so prepare for more songs, outlandish news reports, catchy ad jingles, and late-night conspiracy theories.

Every new thread running throughout has been woven with attention to detail, all with the added bonus of Two Point Studios giving us many laughs along the way. The big question is: what will we build next?



Two Point Studios delivers for its second title, adding the perfect mix of challenge, humour, and customisation to campus. A truly joyful experience at the University Of U. Vic Phaeasey

8

PLAY

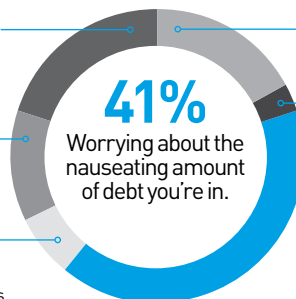
THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: TWO POINT CAMPUS

20% Wishing you could study every single course on Two Point's timetable.

12% Wanting to become the new Cheesy Gubbins snack mascot.

7% Dragging security-trained janitors to rid campus of invaders.



17% Getting annoyed with litter that's simply dumped next to a bin.

3% Enjoying host Harrison Wolff's husky tones on Campus Radio a little too much.

HOW TO... RID CAMPUS OF INTRUDERS



Train or hire a couple of Janitors with the security skill. Once alerted, zoom out with **LB** and watch your entry points as the invaders run in. Click **LB** to pause time, then pick up each Janitor and drop them next to intruders – it's far quicker than forcing them to make their way on foot!

STATPACK

03

Stars to earn per campus. Improving curriculums and ticking off criteria will help. Planning a few events never goes amiss either.

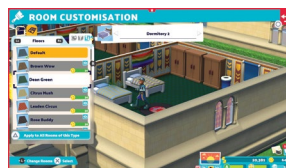
36

Trophies make this a completionist's dream. There's a ton of achievements to tick off the roster and keep you busy between all those lectures.

04

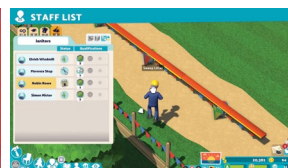
Modes in Sandbox mode once unlocked. Standard, creative, challenge, and custom options await across your choice of 12 colleges.

LOVING/HATING



NEW YEAR, NEW ME

Spending Kudosh to customise floors, walls, and even outfits throughout campus, so we can make any college our own.



ABSOLUTE TRASH

Unlike other items on campus, you can't click and request Janitors to pick up litter. It's an uncomfortable drag for us both.

TROPHY CABINET

YOU LOSE SOME



BRONZE

Losing 15 Cheeseball Matches isn't that bad. It's the taking part that counts... honest!

BOOKWORM FANATIC



SILVER

Put your reactions to the test and capture 50 Bookworms with fast fingers.

SUPER GROUP OF FRIENDS



GOLD

Developing 500 friendships bags you the gold, so sharpen those social skills.



Hell Pie

Platforming in bad taste



INFO

FORMAT PS5, (reviewed) PS4,
PRICE £19.99
ETA Out now
PUB Headup Games
DEV Sluggersfly
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 6 hrs
ACCESSIBILITY Speech bubble text (not size adjustable); colour blind modes



Have you ever played a platforming game and thought ‘What this needs is a lot of juvenile humour and some fart jokes’? Then good news: Hell Pie is here for you. If you’ve never thought that, there’s a chance the platforming might appeal to you nonetheless, but it’s a slim chance, and you’ll have to play with the audio off and your eyes closed.

The premise is simple enough: you’re a demon working in hell when your boss, Satan, calls you up to complain that his pie isn’t ready. Your job has nothing to do with pies, but we’ve all had bosses ask us for things outside our remit before, and Satan can literally melt you through a phone line, so off you go to talk to the chef. The chef, whose bare bottom greets you, had forgotten about this pie, and sends you off on a journey to collect the grossest and most vile ingredients out there in the underworld. You’re not alone, though. You’ve got a chunky cherub called Nugget by your side, and they’re responsible for the most interesting platforming mechanic in the game: the ability to swing. They’re also incredibly annoying, but it certainly does fit with the rest of the game.

CHERUB ROCK

You’ve got standard platforming moves like the double jump and dash, and you can also swing from your cherub on a chain while they’re hovering in midair. You can then use the momentum from that swing, along with abilities you unlock later on, to make jumping from place to place a little smoother.

It’s a fun mechanic, but it’s nowhere near enough to see you through until the end of the game without losing interest. This is especially true as sometimes the buttons just won’t respond, for no obvious reason. You’ll be trying to get through a tricky high-speed platforming section and instead

musk, you’ll find yourself struggling to get into the game. It could be that if the comedy hits you just right you’ll find the whole thing more enjoyable, but the platforming isn’t really worth the risk. There’s nothing that makes Hell Pie worthy of your time and attention, which is all the more annoying because

Poo-based humour permeates Hell Pie like the stench of skunk musk.

of jumping your little devil dude will simply plummet, or little baby Nugget will decide not to let you swing, and once again, into the depths you go.

When you tie that in with the underwhelming visuals and the omnipresent, aggravating poo-based humour that permeates Hell Pie like the stench of skunk

every so often the mechanics come together to allow you to feel like the lord of platforming.

The joy of managing to get through a tricky section just isn’t frequent enough here, and the whole game simply feels hellish to play. Maybe that’s the point, but it’s not the strategy we’d expect from a game.



Hell Pie has some fun mechanics marred by pre-juvenile humour and platforming that always feels a little bit off. It’ll be fun for some, but not worth sinning for. Jason Coles





Story Of Seasons: Pioneers Of Olive Town

We built this city on rocks and turnips



INFO

FORMAT PS4

PRICE £34.99

ETA Out now

PUB Marvelous

DEV Marvelous

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 40+ hrs

ACCESSIBILITY

Adjustable message speed; photo mode control inversion; extended volume controls

This farm-'em-up is the latest in long line of farming sims – once named Harvest Moon, the series became Story Of Seasons in 2014 – and it's the relaxing, overwhelmingly adorable experience that you'd expect. As an original entry in the series, rather than a remake like Friends Of Mineral Town, it treads new ground and has lots of extra options and details that give you a fuller experience.

Beyond growing crops, tending to animals, and looking for love in the colourful town, you've got expanded character customisation options to play with, plus masses of things to craft and ways to upgrade both your tools and buildings so you can transform your grandfather's plot of land into an expansive, carefully-constructed mega-farm.

While you're sorting out your life on the farm, Olive Town needs your help to become a flourishing tourist destination. The townspeople make all sorts of requests, and carrying them out results in changes such as new shops popping up, as well as helping fill the friendship meter of whoever you've helped. That's the bulk of what there is in terms of story, but it's enough to give you something to focus on, and the freedom the game allows you in taking it in which direction you prefer is very welcome. With a series of mines to conquer for rare ores, a rather addictive fishing minigame, and

a request from the museum to collect and photograph wildlife, farming is only one of the pleasures spread before you to pass your time in and out of the town's bustling hub.

FARMED AND READY

Though you can sequester yourself away and rarely, if ever, talk to anyone, participating in events throughout the year is both fun and rewarding, and the roster of potential love interests is a key feature. You can befriend pretty much everyone, whether there's romantic potential or not... and what else are you going to do with all the petunias you've grown if not hand them to every person you meet? (Answer: sell them so you can buy another really cute cow.)

From the adorably round animals to the anime-style people, the cartoon style makes everything bright, colourful, and aggressively cute. Of course, the weather and seasons play a role, from drifting cherry blossoms to crashes of thunder. Your character's look can be customised with clothes and accessories bought in the town, for a fully rounded seasonal experience, or you can trek out in the storm in a giant mascot costume. Why not? New items will pop up each day, making wrestling your land back from saplings, rocks, and weeds a part of your routine. Even in a small way, there's always something happening, and it's lovely to look at the whole game year-round.



An already strong formula has been honed into a deep and delightful farming sim. Ironically not genre pioneering, but it'll still put you in a good mood. **Max Williams**



Matches can quickly devolve into a chaos of explosive, colourful attacks, which is great fun.



MultiVersus

Come on and slam

Emerging from a cloud of smoke, Batman joins the fray, socking Superman in the teeth before hurling a batarang at... Garnet from Steven Universe? "This one's for Shaggy," he mutters, Kevin Conroy providing lines for the iconic character, while the Scooby-Doo hero powers up in the background, seemingly embracing the 'ultra instinct' Shaggy internet meme. The brave and the bold indeed – this is a punch-up for the ages.

The brawls hosted by moustachioed plumbers aside, the platform/fighter crossover has always been a genre that's struggled to land its punches, despite the promising character lineups in the likes of PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale and Nickelodeon All-Stars Brawl. Warner Bros, however, has invested in MultiVersus enough to make it feel fantastic as soon as you pick up the controller. It meshes together fighters that feel great to control as they hop between platforms and land comically large strikes with a unifying art style that smartly helps quirky Golden Age cartoons stand beside cartoonified live-action characters (like Arya, from Game Of Thrones).

GLEAM EATER

In fact, MultiVersus feels so good to play that its shortcomings are all the more obvious in contrast. These mostly stem from its free-to-play structure.



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4

PRICE Free-to-play, with microtransactions and Founder's Pack options (£32.99-£79.99)

ETA Out now (early access)

PUB Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment
DEV Player First Games

PLAYERS 1-4

LENGTH N/A
ACCESSIBILITY Remappable controls; customisable HUD; many toggles and adjustments for specific move inputs

□ × ○ △ □ × ○ △
△ □ × ○ △ □ × ○
○ △ □ × ○ △ □ ×

Technically released in early access (though the PlayStation Store page makes no mention of this), it's more accurate to call this a soft launch. Everything is in place: a hefty fighting roster, multiple modes to play and, of course, battle passes, skins, and emotes, plus more to spend various currencies on.

Additional fighters are on the way, and some are even marked as 'experimental', so you know they're prime for tweaking. (Balance patches are already rolling out, as they do for any good fighting game.) Despite the large roster, only a handful are unlocked for free, rotated in and out every two weeks. Fighters can be unlocked permanently with a character pass from the founder's pack, 'Gleamium' (an

in-game currency which can only be purchased with real-world money), or 3,000 gold (which is earnable in-game, but that's a fairly large sum).

Everything is monetised, and the characters are one of few aspects unlockable with gold at the time of writing. Almost everything else, from emotes to skins, requires Gleamium. And a lot of those skins require 1,500 Gleamium, yet the smallest purchasable quantities are 1,000 and 450 – egging you on to buy more. You know the drill.

TOON SQUAD

It's a shame we have to issue all these caveats, as the fighting itself is rather fun. Three modes make up the core experience – 1v1, 2v2, and free-for all, all

Fighters feel great to control as they hop between platforms and land comically large strikes.

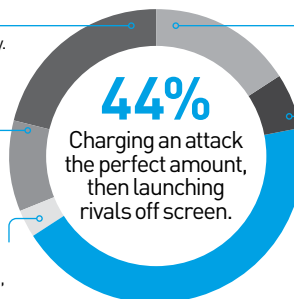
THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: MULTIVERSUS

21% Mashing **[X]** to dodge out the way. Ain't ya a stinker?

10% Getting out a calculator to work out the actual real-world price of a skin.

3% Trying to decide on a voice pack to buy. Matthew Lillard, we choose you.



16% Forcing yourself to play a class to complete limited-time challenges.

6% Humming along to the Steven Universe theme tune.

HOW TO... FIND THE FIGHTER FOR YOU



Each fighter is categorised by both their whacking capability (horizontal, vertical, or hybrid) and their class. Mages dabble in tricks with cooldowns, Support are best in teams, Bruisers dish out damage, Tanks can take it, and Assassins can send foes flying.

STATPACK

15 | 04 | £15

Levels for each fighter, meaning mastering them feels genuinely rewarding. Points mean prizes, such as additional perks or character icons.

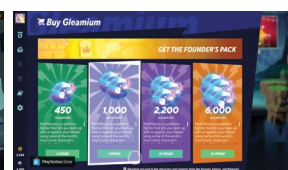
Perks can be equipped to a fighter at any one time, giving them boosts like extra air-attack damage or armour for one second after dodging.

The approximate amount you'll need to spend for a new fighter skin. We'd have to really like a particular character to spend that.

LOVING/HATING



CHARACTER FULL
Details ensure the characters feel true to the originals – just check out Tom's classic distorted wail when he's beaten.



MORE PROBLEMS
Free games often have microtransactions, but this is riddled with them – the options appear on most menus.

IS IT BETTER THAN?



YES

Focused on indie crossover fighters, Brawlhalla was utterly joyless to actually play.



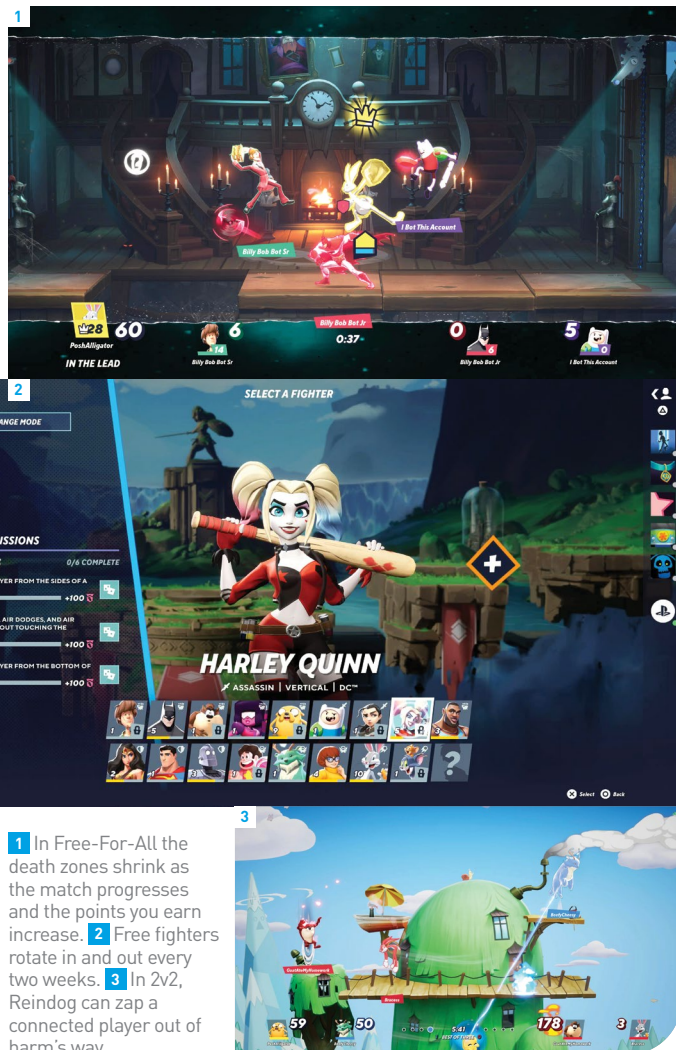
YES

'Smashing' Nickelodeon All-Stars Brawlhalla wasn't. Showed promise, but lacked MultiVersus' polish.



YES

The icons were packed into PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale but the gameplay was dull.



1 In Free-For-All the death zones shrink as the match progresses and the points you earn increase. 2 Free fighters rotate in and out every two weeks. 3 In 2v2, Reindog can zap a connected player out of harm's way.

playable against bots, or with casual or ranked matchmaking. Rules can be lightly customised, and there's even local play for parties. Quite the fray, the goal is always to send opponents flying by charging smashing attacks after you've built up their damage meter high enough, all set against backdrops of iconic locations like Adventure Time's treehouse or a haunted mansion from Scooby-Doo.

Designed with 2v2 in mind, the team play is much better than you might expect. Fighters' special moves often have beneficial effects on allies as well as harmful ones on rivals – Bugs Bunny's tunnel doesn't just create a ground explosion to send foes tumbling, but can carry you and a friend away from danger, for instance.

The design shows a real love for the eclectic mix of characters. All play with the same elegant simplicity, having a normal attack button and special attack button both modified by simple directional input and whether you're jumping, but each character feels different from the rest. Velma scoots around the stage gathering clues and yelling (with weighty speech bubbles); Tom and Jerry fight each other, foes getting caught up in the chaos; and LeBron James hurls his basketball all over, getting net dunks at rivals' expense. If you can stand the constant monetisation, this is a genre high bar, a delight to pick up and play, while mastering the intricacies of a childhood favourite brought to marvellous life is also a joy.



Full of love for the characters, and crunchy to play, you owe it to yourself to give this a go – though the monetisation methods are off-putting. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

8

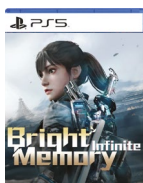
PLAY



Enemies and environments are a mixture of ancient and modern, while you also juggle guns with melee.

Bright Memory: Infinite

A spectacular, if shallow, solo effort



INFO

FORMAT PS5
PRICE £24.99
ETA Out now
PUB Playism
DEV FYQD Studio
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 2 hrs
ACCESSIBILITY
 Basic difficulty options

Given its name, you might assume FYQD Studio is a sizable company made up of veteran developers who've set out to make a big-budget shooter that can rival Call Of Duty. Yet the developer of Bright Memory: Infinite is actually a lone developer from China who spent years making the game by learning and using Unreal Engine without having to write code. That's jaw-dropping.

At least, it is at first glance. This often visually spectacular but fairly superficial, short campaign has all the hallmarks of a young developer's attempt to hit the big time. They've evidently looked not only at FPSs but at every other popular genre to poach ideas, taking and discarding with all the rush of a fast food drive-in.

Of course there are guns, from automatics to pistols to shotguns to sniper rifles, but you're also endowed with a light blade and an Exo arm that makes for quick melee combat. The latter enables you to force-grab enemies and then make them combust. Your timing is as important as your accuracy as a paranormal anomaly starts bringing in ancient warriors with shields you need to be able to parry before unleashing your counter.

You also have the ability to wall run, although a few other tools, such as a grapple, are merely QTE prompts. Even stealth gets incorporated into the action, which is more of a drag, though fortunately getting discovered by the enemy doesn't necessarily mean instant failure. Nonetheless, you can't fault the effort to introduce

variety – many a new developer might have focused on only one or two elements to refine.

INFINITE POSSIBILITY

If you didn't know this was mostly the work of one man (aside from obvious elements like music, voice acting, and localisation), you'd perhaps feel

dead-eyed doll. The other few on-screen characters also don't fare well, featuring in a forgettable story – which makes it even more bizarre that a few chapters are just cutscenes.

Nonetheless, if this is just a glorified tech demo, it's still an impressive achievement that this is getting a retail release

■ If you didn't know this was the work of one man, you'd perhaps feel short-changed. ■

short-changed by how quickly it's all over. Your only reasons to replay are wanting to play on a higher difficulty, or to play using the number of rather revealing outfits (that's definitely *not* what we thought a cheongsam looked like) for protagonist Shelia, which only makes her more of a creepy

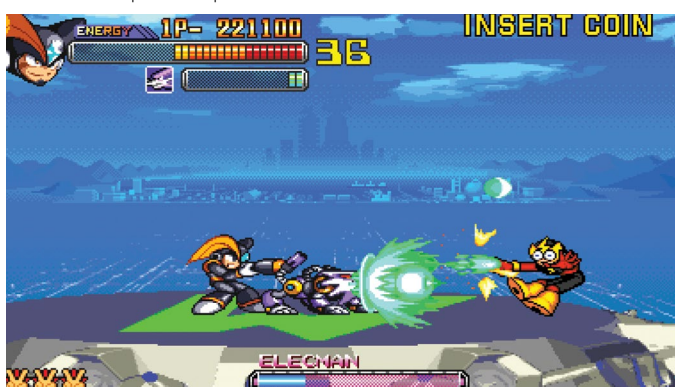
when there are plenty of Unreal fan projects that never make it this far. It's certainly a strong start from FYQD, whose compatriots have likewise been sharing footage of even more impressive in-progress projects in recent years. It's a sign that China's indie-triple-A scene is just getting started.



An impressive solo debut that gives triple-A shooters a run for their money, even if all the gimmicks quickly give way to reveal a rather short-lived affair. **Alan Wen**



INFO FORMAT PS4 PRICE £32.99 ETA Out now
PUB Capcom DEV Capcom PLAYERS 1-4



Capcom Arcade 2nd Stadium

Capcommunicating game history

We remember when a single arcade game was so big, it could only fit in a huge cabinet. Nowadays you can cram 32 into one download. Talk about shrinkflation! While you can grab SonSon for free and then add other games as DLC, we're reviewing the complete package, which is worth buying.

It's pleasing to see how heavily weighted the collection is on the side of beat-'em-ups. If you have a friend or family member who's keen to play them with you (no online play, sadly), this

Eco Fighters and Side Arms are neat shoot-'em-ups, and Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo is a puzzle classic. Block Block is basically an Arkanoid ripoff, but it's a good Arkanoid ripoff.

(AR)CADE-6

It's not just a straight ROM dump, either. You can fiddle with things such as game speed and number of lives, as well as various display options (though the oldest games are distorted in full-screen mode). Naturally, you can also pump in as many virtual coins as you like without having to worry about a grownup shouting at you about it later.

■ We'd argue that this is a better choice for genre fans than Capcom Fighting Collection. ■

is an essential purchase. With games including Street Fighter Alpha 1-3, Darkstalkers 1-3, and the wonderfully camp wrestling fighter Saturday Night Slam Masters, we'd argue that this is a better choice for genre fans than Capcom Fighting Collection.

There *are* other types of game, of course, and while there are some duffers to make up the numbers, the quality is generally higher than you might expect.

This may be best appreciated by the older players among us who can come back to a game that slaughtered them in the arcades decades ago and bellow "Who's beating who now?" Good games are good regardless of your age, though, and there are plenty of those in here. Throw in the ability to rewind gameplay and save game states, and you really do have a game for everybody.



A superior collection to the first Arcade Stadium, this is an excellent way to revisit your youth and/or discover quality games that you never knew existed. **Luke Kemp**

8

PLAY

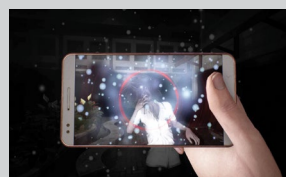
THREE TO PLAY



PSN games you might have missed



Every month, tonnes of new games come to the PS Store. It's impossible to play them all, so we're looking back at some that didn't make the cut. This month, we're reminiscing about our school years, so pack your bag and prepare to head back to the classroom.

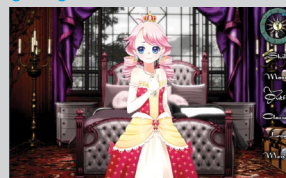


If you think your time at school was rough, **DreadOut 2** follows the plight of Linda, a high school student who's been left to take on an army of the

undead with nothing but a smartphone camera. Snapping shots of spirits inflicts damage on them, so you need to take plenty of pictures if you're going to survive. With deep lore inspired by Indonesian urban legends, plus the open-world environment of a small town to explore, there's a lot to sink your teeth into here. If you've been holding out for a new Fatal Frame, DreadOut 2 might just scratch your ghost hunting itch.



Overdue homework is the least of your worries in the universe of Danganronpa, which sees students coerced into killing each other at the behest of an evil teddy bear (see p105). **Danganronpa S: Ultimate Summer Camp** ups the ante by placing its unlucky undergrads on an island camp run by not one, but five evil teddy bears. The tropical setting of this new board-game spin-off offers some light relief from the brutality of the main series, but that doesn't mean everything is going to be smooth sailing. With six boards to traverse and a handful of bosses to defeat in its dungeon-crawling battle mode, you're going to need luck on your side as well as a hefty bottle of sunblock if you want to survive summer break. There's no point having a beach body if someone's just going to draw a white line around it.



Being a ruler is tough, especially if you're only 14 years old. **Long Live The Queen** has you helping soon-to-be-queen Elodie finish her studies, see to her nation's diplomatic matters, and avoid almost daily murder plots. With 40 weeks to go until her coronation, managing her mood and raising her skills is an essential part of keeping her alive long enough to get the shiny hat. Death is almost inevitable, but multiple endings and a slew of branching paths to explore help keep each playthrough feeling fresh. Don't let the game's adorable art style fool you, this is a tense political management sim that doesn't pull any punches.

Arcadegeddon

Best think twice before inserting coin here



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4
PRICE £24.99
ETA Out now
PUB Illfonic
DEV Illfonic
OFFLINE REVIEW N/A
PLAYERS 1-4
CROSSPLAY PC, Xbox
CROSS-GEN Yes

After spending almost exactly one year in early access, this gaming cake comes across as half-baked. We might even prefer the early access version, simply because the promise of improvements to come made us more forgiving of the rough edges. Diving into the final version on PS5, we nearly hit our proverbial heads, as the experience is shallower than we had hoped.

First impressions are not good, and not just because of the eye-strainingly tiny UI text on loot. The whole experience is *painfully* 'How do you do, fellow kids?', from the acquired taste of the dubstep-EDM-hip hop soundtrack to the godawful stylised dialogue, and even the basic setup of a small arcade standing up to The Man, a huge

■ The fundamental shooting controls are great and there's good variety in the weapons. ■

corporation with a monopoly on videogames.

Once you've spent 30 to 45 minutes wading through an ocean of terrible writing and badly weighted tutorials – they tend to explain the obvious, skim over what actually needs detail, and include a physically painful moment of celebrating

microtransactions – you can finally concentrate on the game proper. *Then* things improve immensely.

The main attraction is Adventure mode, which is for up to four players (do *not* play this solo, it quickly becomes boring that way). It's essentially an endless third-person PvE



shoot-'em-up that randomly loops through six biomes, ending only when everybody dies or quits. The fundamental shooting controls are great, there's good variety in the weapons to be looted, and the urge to be the one at the top of the scoreboard at the end of each level is ever-present. Throw in online leaderboards, and score chasers are going to absolutely love this.

GAMEY TASTE

The problem is, a good team can easily make one run last for *hours*, and there's no mode that offers any limit on time or levels. A team of four can and will drop to a team of three or two on a particularly long run, as people with real-world lives to live drop out to do other things. On our longest run, we and the people who we played with ended up



constantly increasing the difficulty and triggering boss fights, desperate for the sweet release of character death so that we could claim all our bonuses (though if you quit, you still get to keep XP for all completed levels).

Climbing the leaderboards is more about time investment than skill, and the PvP mode on

offer, while fortunately limited to a set number of games, is little more than a distraction you might return to in order to complete a daily challenge. This shows such potential. If only that early access time had been used to implement UI text that's big enough to read, and to introduce counters to potential player fatigue.



The core experience is great, but it's surrounded by clutter, and sometimes drawn out to tiresome lengths. Arcadegeddon still doesn't feel finished. **Luke Kemp**





PS5 Hall of fame

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE NEW GEN'S GREATEST GAMES



01



Deathloop

Endlessly stylish, we keep coming back to this time and time again. Trapped on a time-looping island, Colt must blast his way out by assassinating eight targets in one day, using special powers to get the upper hand, all while avoiding a (sometimes player-controlled) rival hunter, Julianna. With everything we love about Arkane's games distilled into one hyper-slick experience, this is a must-play.

02



Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart

A delightful return for the lombax/robo duo, using PS5's power to allow seamless portal hopping and stunning vistas and DualSense to give the comically large arsenal real oomph. A real showpiece that feels marvellous in the hands, and makes the case for PS5 exclusives.

09



Astro's Playroom

Free and pre-installed on your PS5, this is more than a showcase for your new console's best, most innovative features. Astro's Playroom is a beautifully crafted, if short-lived, platform adventure that takes a tour through everything that makes PS5 so special.

03



Demon's Souls

Not many games allow you to feel the thrum of a gigantic heart in the controller. From sword slashes against nightmarish creatures to feeling magic fill your hands, this stunning recreation of the PS3 classic is a tour of just what makes PS5 so great.

10



Resident Evil Village

Ethan Winters discovers why this village's house prices were so low. As he searches for his stolen baby, tall vampire Lady Dimestreco tees off a host of supernatural nasties in the slickest Resi to date, mixing bombastic action with some series-topping fright.

04



Uncharted: Legacy Of Thieves Collection

The best got better. Presenting Nathan Drake's final outing alongside spin-off The Lost Legacy, this collection implements a range of PS5 features. Higher framerates smooth out the action, haptic feedback boosts gunfights, and 3D audio adds a new dimension to the banter.

11



Ghost Of Tsushima Director's Cut

Feeling like a fresh take on Assassin's Creed, the open-world island of Tsushima is engaging to explore, and thanks to a minimal UI, endlessly beautiful. Combined with weighty combat and tricky stealth, this supercharged version feels like a real epic.

05



Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade

Cloud and the gang get a glow up with better visuals and slicker combat that limit breaks this bold reimagining of the Midgar section. Yuffie joins in with an extra story that bridges the gap between this and what's to come, cleverly playing on nostalgia and fan expectation.

12



Gran Turismo 7

Like taking a bath in luxury motor oil while Yamauchi and the rest of Polyphony Digital relax you with cosy car history. The good vibes are matched by fantastic visual fidelity, and car handling enhanced by the DualSense controller for unparalleled driving feedback.

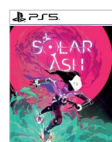
06



Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales

A new hero for a new generation, Miles Morales swings on to PS5 with a new sense of purpose. The low-key story offers a more intimate Spider-adventure than Parker's bombastic escapade, but when the action kicks in, the ray-traced visuals light up the screen.

13



Solar Ash

Playing like a cross between Jet Set Radio and Sonic, gliding through the Ultravoid feels buttery-smooth. The subtle rumble of the DualSense offers an immersive layer to both movement and the action of pinning down an enemy. This is well worth losing yourself in.

07



Control Ultimate Edition

Jesse Faden's mind-bending, environment-destroying, object-chucking new-weird adventure sings on PS5. A framerate of 60fps delights, and Remedy's use of ray tracing is among the best we've seen. The sole problem is you have to pick only one of two visual options.

14



Guilty Gear Strive

If this is the smell of the game, then we don't need any candles. Brash as ever, and laden with head-banging tracks, this anime-styled fighter is a spectacle to watch or play. Pared-down mechanics make it accessible, but there's still plenty of depth for skilled players.

08



Hitman 3

On PS5, Agent 47's latest hit list looks beautiful – oh boy, those reflections. The good news is not only can you play the latest missions on PS5, you can replay all missions from Hitman and Hitman 2 inside IO's new PS5-developed engine. That's a lot of content.

15



The Nioh Collection

Team Ninja is on top form with its unique samurai take on soulslikes. Tough as hanzo steel, both games run great on PS5, and offer nearly 200 hours of co-op demon-slaying action that'd put even Yojimbo through his paces. It's a challenge well worth taking on.

16



Elden Ring

Souls goes open world, and FromSoftware makes sure to do things its way: with minimal handholding, but plenty of digit-strewn enemies. Each hill teases strange dark fantasy sights just over the crest, and the game keeps surprising (despite some rare repetition).

17



Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order

Cal and BD-1 Jedi jump over any hurdles the original release threw their way, PS5's power making this feel like the game it should have been at launch. While a little safe at times, this adventure feels like classic Star Wars as you explore planets metroidvania-style.

18



Horizon Forbidden West

Stunning to look at on PS5, Aloy's new quest gets even more science-fictional. While more of the same in some regards (there are plenty of question marks to explore and camps to clear), in big machine fights the metal really shines, and there are some absolute units here.

19



Ghostwire: Tokyo

Possessed by ghost hunter KK, Akito has to put a stop to a masked villain who has unleashed demonic fog all over Tokyo. The open world is packed with collectibles and side-missions that explore Japanese folklore, and the DualSense-rumbling combat is punchy.

20



Final Fantasy XIV: Online

Endwalker presents a compelling conclusion to this MMORPG's decade-long storyline. The journey on PS5 from the beginning is a smooth one too, boasting breezy load times across Eorzea and beyond. Besides all that, who doesn't want to be a cool cat- or bunny-person?

21



Disco Elysium: The Final Cut

Welcome to Revachol. You're a mess of a cop with no memory and barely any clothes. Solve a hanging, invent communism, sing karaoke... but do it your way. Skill check successes and failures pave a story of your own, and the writing is superb.

22



Hades

After a wait, Supergiant's latest rushes to the defence of roguelikes and leaves us going "Hell yeah." It effortlessly pulls off that 'just one more go' feeling thanks to fast, frenetic combat and the rewarding nuggets of story each death treats you to. Slick and stylish.

23



Paradise Killer

Welcome to the bizarre, regenerating island of Paradise, where the ruling Council has been murdered. Play as expert investigator Lady Love Dies and explore the vaporwave landscape, in which you have unmatched freedom to find or fail to find the truth.

24



Bugsnax

You are what you eat in this peculiar adventure that's not afraid to walk (and crawl) its own path. Scour Snaktooth Island for its missing denizens, wolf down a handful of Snax... and see what happens. It doesn't exactly push PS5, but it will test your imagination.

25



Grid Legends

Sticking like glue to the racing line between arcade racer and sim, this is Codemasters at its most finely tuned. A cheesy FMV story mode gets you in the mood to put your foot down and amass a huge garage of racing modes, types, and vehicles. The stuff of Legends.

PLAY ON

Know what you like and looking for more? Here are some PS5 options you'll enjoy



Has **Hades** got you feeling downright divine? It might be a game with heaps of replayability, but variety is the spice of life even in the underworld, so here are some picks that might scratch a similar itch, be they roguelikes or something a little different.

PICK #1



The Binding Of Isaac: Repentance

Crying out for safety

You'd expect a roguelike from Super Meat Boy co-creator Edmund McMillen to be a little off-kilter, but Isaac takes the cake... then it scuttles off and kills you, probably. Playing as the titular child, you need to escape a dungeon your Carrie-like, overly religious mother has trapped you in. The joy here is in the number of random combinations you can face during your run, and the number of modes and characters you can use to take them on.

PICK #2



Returnal

And then I just started blastin'!

Gods won't save you in space, but you'll be praying for good luck on your next run nonetheless. Housemarque's first roguelike might lack the mechanical bite of Hades, but Selene's attempt to escape from a hostile, creepy planet's time loop has a strong narrative that incorporates failure into the story, and looks downright stunning on PS5. Fully 3D, it folds the developer's shoot-'em-up experience into one with plenty of clutch battles in each new room.

PICK #3



Immortals Fenyx Rising

An ancient Greek epic

That's right, Assassin's Creed Odyssey isn't Ubisoft's only open world game inspired by Greek mythology, but here it gets a lot more literal as you use gifts bestowed upon you by the gods to fight monsters. Your adventure is narrated by Zeus and Prometheus, and it's your job to scour the Golden Isle's many kingdoms to restore their gods – the actual ones from the myths. If you're looking for a more straightforward journey through the pantheon, this is it.





PS4 Hall of fame

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE LAST GEN'S GREATEST GAMES



01



Red Dead Redemption 2

You won't find another open world quite like this, the streets of Los Santos paling in comparison to this gorgeous western sprawl. Arthur Morgan's wild west adventure is epic, emotional, and has enough teasing mysteries on every Horizon for no two cowboys' journeys to feel the same. Train robberies, tootin' headshots, and killing racists, there's never a dull moment in Rockstar's greatest.

02



Grand Theft Auto V

Laughing in the face of other cross-gen ports, GTA V on PS4 is more than a mere HD remaster. Upgraded to a glorious 1080p, it weaves together everything that made the PS3 original great, with new music, more dynamic weather, and a game-changing FPS mode.

03



God Of War

A departure in some ways but a resounding return in others, Kratos is back with a son *and* a ruddy big axe. Taking the legend from Greek to Norse mythology, this entry brings a lot to the table while improving on what was core to the earlier series' identity.

04



The Last Of Us Part II

Arguably the original is holistically better but there are few games that push PS4 to its limits as this sequel does. With near photoreal visuals, emotional twists that land, and enough new ideas to ensure you're always thinking, this is a slick followup.

05



Dreams

This is a feature-laden platform of artistic tools that enables you to create everything from characters, elements, and scenes to entire games, and resets any ideas about what a console 'game' should be and do. Dreams should be installed on every PS4.

06



The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt Game Of The Year Edition

The White Wolf's epic journey is an RPG experience like no other on PS4. It's been made even more spectacular with this gigantic pack stuffed with DLC, making it a must-have part of any gaming library.

07



Assassin's Creed Odyssey

A beautiful open world where every Greek island tells a unique story, AC Odyssey is an epic in the truest sense, with lively writing, mythical beasts to battle, and a poignant Assassin's Creed story that lays the bed for all the lore to come. A brilliant spectacle.

08



Horizon Zero Dawn

A staggeringly large world that condenses cracking combat, accessible systems, and uncut eye candy into an action RPG that will please anyone. In Aloy, PlayStation might just have a new icon. Come for the robo-fights, stay for the exquisitely dense mythology.

09



Marvel's Spider-Man

Borrowing heavily from Rocksteady's acclaimed Batman series, this delivers the heart and soul of Marvel's superhero. It ticks every box you could ask for: perfect web-swinging, a powerful story, a roster of classic villains, and all of New York City to defend.

10



Persona 5 Royal

The most stylish JRPG ever made finds its definitive form in expanded release Royal. It combines dark and moving teen angst with unforgettable friendships that power you up in the heart-invading dungeons, and sets the gold standard for the genre.

11



Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

FromSoftware's latest adventure repackages its unflinchingly difficult combat into a fantastical take on feudal Japan. More accessible than Bloodborne but layered with equally clever and subtle ideas, this is director Hidetaka Miyazaki's best yet.

12



Bloodborne

With the finest third-person melee combat in gaming, droolworthy art design, and the most twisted monsters imaginable, this is a gorgeously gothic must-have. The Old Hunters expansion adds enough nightmare fuel to make a return to Yharnam essential.

13



Monster Hunter: World

Presenting a vibrant open world, light on story but heavy on monster-mashing action, this is the most accessible entry in the series yet. Perfecting the feel-good grind through its complex systems and pitch-perfect multiplayer, it's a PS4 must-play.

14



Resident Evil 2

Powered by the RE Engine, this remake is more than a classic game with a facelift. The new Tyrant and improved zombie AI add tension, and fresh areas not seen in the PS1 classic update the core gameplay making this Resi 2 a celebration of PS1 *and* PS4.

15



Yakuza 0

Set in Japan in the '80s, this is the perfect entry point to the long-running series. Bouncing between two heroes, you take part in a crime thriller by bashing enemies into dropping piles of cash, and undertake side-quests that include stealthily buying pornography.

16



Psychonauts 2

Level design and narrative mesh together in this long-awaited sequel. Bounce around vibrant, ever-creative platform worlds inside other peoples' minds as you help them conquer trauma – and save the world. Ever-warm, the script is one of the funniest around.

17



Nier Automata

Few games require immediate replaying, but this *demands* it. The twisty-turny story reveals more just when you think you're done, and the android combat as you explore is top-notch thanks to PlatinumGames' expertise in creating character action titles.

18



Mass Effect Legendary Edition

A space opera in game form. Explore the galaxy as you try to stop a universe-wide threat, building a team of the best as you go. The adventures are better than ever in this smoothed-over version. A fan of science-fiction sagas? You owe it to yourself to have one of your own.

19



Days Gone

On the surface this seems to be a step backwards: a testosterone-fuelled Freaker-killing adventure, one man and his bike versus the apocalypse. Slowly you realise Bend Studio's playing with you, and everything's flipped on its head – while the action's excellent throughout.

20



Dragon Quest XI: Echoes Of An Elusive Age

JRPGs don't get more classic-feeling than this, but DQ embraces its traditional qualities, giving its turn-based fights and Toriyama-designed visuals a modern overhaul. This is an adventure that'll stick with you.

21



Dishonored 2

The follow-up to a PS3 great, mixing a creative skillset with impressive level design to create a Kaldwin-ning immersive sim. From the shifting rooms of The Clockwork Mansion to learning to link your powers, there's so much scope for experimenting.

22



Alien: Isolation

Explore Ridley Scott's original vision of a horrifying future in startling fidelity, as this game recreates the tension with an attention to detail that borders on the obsessive. It's time to remember what made the xenomorph so scary... and then get killed by it.

23



Shadow Of The Colossus

Blueprint completely overhauls the visuals of Team Ico's masterpiece but still manages to match the original step-for-step in its remake. New controls and a beautiful photo mode add to the package. Wander's tragic quest has never looked or played better.

24



Tekken 7: Definitive Edition

The title for best fighter on PS4 is fiercely fought over, but for our prize money King remains the, er, king. Easy to pick up, with plenty of depth, few fighters feel quite as crunchy as this. With all DLC characters now released, from Noctis to Negan, it's time to get sweaty.

25



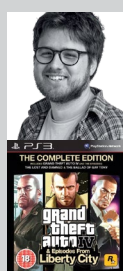
Mafia: Definitive Edition

The mobster fantasy comes to life in this full-on remake. What was once stiff now drips period atmosphere, and while the open world is still mostly set dressing, it delivers a rollicking and affecting crime story. Any limitations almost feel refreshing in retrospect.

STILL PLAYING

Games that continue to hold our attention

PICK #1



Grand Theft Auto V

No, Oscar Taylor-Kent doesn't want to go bowling

Rough around the edges this may be from a modern perspective, but as Niko Bellic steps off that ship into Liberty City, I get the same goosebumps I felt when the game was first released. There's a grounded sense of reality here that Rockstar hasn't evoked with GTA since, making it feel almost more of a piece with Red Dead Redemption 2 than GTA V or GTA Online. But that's no bad thing. Instead of being a stepping stone between the SD era and the larger-than-life GTA V, GTA IV remains unique.

PICK #2



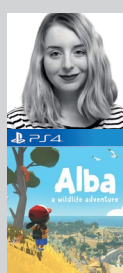
The Sims 4

Dashiell Wood is deleting the ladder to the pool

With years of DLC and updates under its belt, there's never been a better time to come back to The Sims 4. Building a new life from scratch might not seem like the most relaxing way to spend the evening after a long day at work, but the possibility of creating mischief I can't quite get away with at PLAY Towers is second to none. Why not try marrying your Sim into the wealthiest family on the block before conducting an elaborate pool-themed murder and living off the inheritance? All in a day's work...

■ The chance to create mischief I can't quite get away with at PLAY Towers. ■

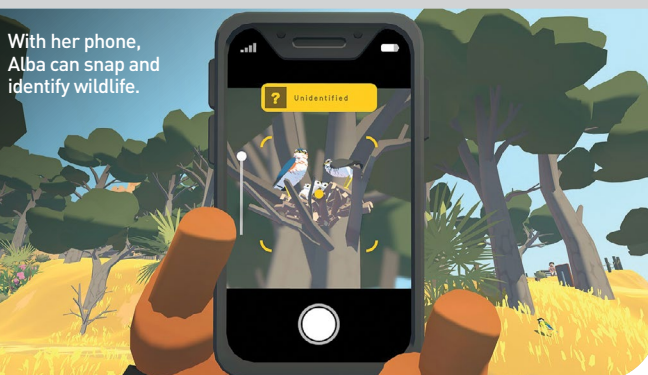
PICK #3



Alba: A Wildlife Adventure

Jess Kinghorn saves the world one turtle at a time

For those of us who've always had the eco-warrior streak, Alba is a sweet island retreat. You explore an idyllic, fictional locale in Spain, picking up trash and documenting wildlife. When a callous hotelier rocks up, he sets his eyes on bulldozing the local nature reserve. It's up to you and your bestie to drive him out through community action – the best part of this escapism is that it works. It's an empowerment fantasy for little kids, but the reminder of what we can achieve doesn't go amiss for grownups.





PSVR Hall of fame

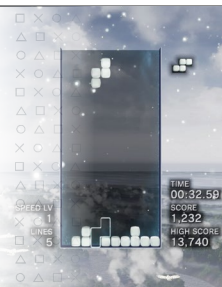
THE VIRTUAL REALITY HITS YOU HAVE TO PLAY

01



Tetris Effect

Tetris, yeah? It might be a great game, but it's easy to understand why you'd brush this version off as 'just more Tetris' at a glance. Yet Tetsuya Mizuguchi's trippy, transcendent take on the block-based puzzler is nothing short of a masterpiece. Sure, you can play it without PSVR, but in the virtual space it really becomes next level, transforming one of the tightest puzzle games ever made into an emotional ride.



02



Hitman 3

Every mission in the World Of Assassination trilogy can be played in PSVR via the latest entry in the series. That's a lot of murderous action. It all plays brilliantly too, with the act of puzzling through hits as Agent 47 perfectly suited to virtual reality. One of PSVR's best.

09



Keep Talking And Nobody Explodes

Who knew bombs could bring people *together*? With one headsetted Defuser, and as many Experts as you can fit around a 23-page manual, no other VR game comes close for inclusive, endless multiplayer fun. Just make sure you don't let Ian issue any instructions – KABOOM!

03



The Persistence

This first-person horror roguelike offers perfectly sized chunks of survival bursts. It's everything you'd expect from a full PS4 release, but in PSVR it's filled with clever ideas, unique weapons, genuine jump scares, and fab looks – plus great couchplay as well.

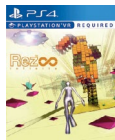
10



Statik

Saw meets Portal in this fantastic puzzler. It makes ingenious use of the DualShock 4 by giving every button a specific function. You'll need to use them all to free your hands from the strange box in which they're trapped. An intriguing concept done well.

04



Rez Infinite

Tetsuya Mizuguchi's vision becomes reality in PSVR. This psychedelic rhythm rail shooter has achieved its final form. Its crowning achievement? New level Area X; it's powerful enough to bring players to tears. Worthy of its name, this is a timeless title.

11



Firewall: Zero Hour

There's only one game mode, a cat-and-mouse assault to find and either destroy or protect a laptop, but when the shooting is this laser-focused, who could want more? A PS Aim controller is a must to get the most from PSVR's standout shooter.

05



Astro Bot Rescue Mission

This pint-sized adventure packs charm in spades even if it isn't exactly chock-full of challenge. Bringing the classic puzzle platformer formula bang up to date in PSVR, it won't take many levels before you're calling out, "Beam me up, Botty!" Also, the nippers will love it.

12



Resident Evil VII: Biohazard

Can you can go eye-to-eye with the Bakers? Playing in VR raises the tension to almost unbearable levels and has gameplay benefits such as face-aiming, which makes shooting a lot easier. A brilliant example of how VR can improve already great games.

06



Star Wars: Squadrons

A fan's dream come true: experience epic Star Wars space battles from the cockpits of the films' most famous starfighters. Whether you're flying a TIE fighter or X-wing there's absolutely no thrill like skimming the surface of a Star Destroyer in PS VR.

13



Sniper Elite VR

With realistic gunplay at the heart of this series, it was always going to be a natural fit for VR. But its support for an array of setups and how it squeezes a truly impressive amount of tension into 20-minute missions means this hits the bullseye of VR greatness.

07



Iron Man VR

With a finely-crafted control setup that enables flight within small sandbox maps, and gives you the option to inhabit the designer shoes of the billionaire playboy too, Iron Man VR is an almost-perfect interpretation of the famous Avenger. It's a PSVR must-play.

14



Doom VFR

A new take on a classic game, this proves first-person shooters can shine in PSVR. A mix of control choices, including the PS Aim controller, ensures Doom is as fast and fluid in VR as it's ever been. Every PSVR owner needs this demon-slaying outing in their collection.

08



Blood & Truth

The truth? You can't handle the truth. But if you can, then you'll discover one of PSVR's best shooters, tied to the kind of slick cinematic narrative we're used to from Sony's non-VR releases. Blood & Truth is one of the most complete games for PSVR.

15



To The Top

This creative platform-puzzler enables you to scamper, jump, and skate across its 35 sandbox worlds with the aid of your PS Move controllers. It's as physically demanding to play as it is perplexing, and all the better for it. To The Top is a PSVR one-off.

16



Star Trek: Bridge Crew

Mixes the fanboy fantasy of nestling in the Captain's chair (or taking control of the helm, weapons, or engineering section) on a USS starship with the strongest co-op experience on PSVR. This is Star Trek's finest hour on PlayStation, and the community's great.

17



Everybody's Golf VR

Golf and virtual reality go together like ham and eggs or rhubarb and custard. Mmm, tasty. In PSVR you swing and chip shots, lean over putts, and become immersed in the act of putting a ball in a small hole. It's near perfection, and one of PSVR's essentials.

18



Sprint Vector

A crazy mix of SSX racing and obstacle course hijinks, Sprint Vector makes use of the best control setup on PSVR to deliver a near-perfect experience. A single-player Challenge mode and online races impress; only the poor single-player AI holds it back.

19



I Expect You To Die 2: The Spy and The Liar

A spy comedy offering a front-row seated experience. Known as The Phoenix to your foes, you thwart villains across six missions delightfully steeped in genre tropes. Short, silly, and slick – like only the best agents.

20



The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim VR

Though compromises have been made to texture detail and controls, you get all – yes, *all* – of The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, including the expansions, inside PSVR. It's immense. The scale and organic nature of the world at your feet overcomes any shortcomings.

21



Beat Saber

With your PSVR headset firmly on and PS Move controllers in hand, Beat Saber feels like the game both pieces of hardware were made for. In it you have to master songs and challenges by swiping your neon swords through the air and dodging with your head.

22



Moss: Book II

Arriving late in PSVR's life, this storybook followup spirits you away on an adventure that's every bit the mouse's whiskers. Quill's winning charm is back, and expanded combat mechanics sees your bond with the great mouse protagonist become stronger than ever.

23



Accounting+

One of PlayStation's funniest games is a dark, twisted journey into the world of accounting. No, don't walk away now! It's an Inception-like dive into increasingly bizarre and frequently hilarious scenarios that will scratch the itch of any Rick And Morty fan.

24



Farpoint

This sci-fi shooter is a brilliant showcase for the PS Aim controller, a versatile bit of kit that makes the satisfying range of weapons it stands in for feel weighty and real. The game matches it, delivering a strong story and challenging co-op for great VR action.

25



Knockout League

Punching things is possibly the least creative use of the VR medium, but when it's used to create a classic arcade boxing sim that plays like a brutal puzzle puncher, it's irresistible. It's also good for you: it tracks your calorie count as you work up a sweat.



WHAT'S NEW PLUS-SY CAT?

Digging into the random acts of gaming a lengthy PS Plus subscription offers

Last month offered bangers to all PS Plus subscribers. Leading the charge on PS5 and PS4 was JRPG **Yakuza: Like A Dragon**. Wheeling in behind it on both platforms was the **Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2** remaster, before spooky puzzler **Little Nightmares** crept in only on PS4.

As fantastic as all of these are, we've got our eyes on only one prize fighter – **Yakuza: Like A Dragon**. This entry isn't just remembered for swapping everyone's favourite gangster uncle for new protagonist Ichiban Kasuga, but also for shaking up the long-running series' mechanical core.

Listen, leading man-with-the-blown-out-punch-perm Ichiban loves Dragon Quest, so much so that it shapes his entire worldview. What initially began as a well-received April Fool's joke in 2019 became a full-blown turn-based battle system, replacing the beat-'em-up action that's a mainstay of the Yakuza games.

It's far from the most sophisticated turn-based system, and late-game encounters suffer from a sizable difficulty spike. However, it makes the

most of the modern setting, suffusing every aspect with the series' trademark wit. Take the decidedly literal job system: Ichiban can become a typical nightclub Host, dousing enemies in icy waves of champagne while pilfering their pockets. Or he can take the lead as a Foreman, wielding a ruddy great big hammer to dish out hi-vis vengeance to his enemies.

However, a number of jobs are gender-locked. Only your female party members can heal fellow fighters' with uplifting melodies and manufactured charm as the Idol. The lads' Musician job is similar in concept but draws from a different entertainment industry well. We know it's a bit of a young man's game but Ichiban could have no doubt won hearts as a male Idol too.



Forthright Saeko is not afraid to make a splash in combat.

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RetroStation



105 Defending...

Yes, he's a kidnapper and a murderer, but can Monokuma be defended nonetheless?

HIGHLIGHTS

CLASSIC GAME: DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS [102](#) | MEMORY CARD: CROC: LEGEND OF THE GOBBOS [104](#) | FEATURE: CROSS-GENERATION GAMES [106](#) | PLUS POINTS: MR. DRILLER [112](#)
A BRIEF HISTORY OF... NAUGHTY DOG [113](#) | PARTING SHOT: HORIZON ZERO DAWN [114](#)





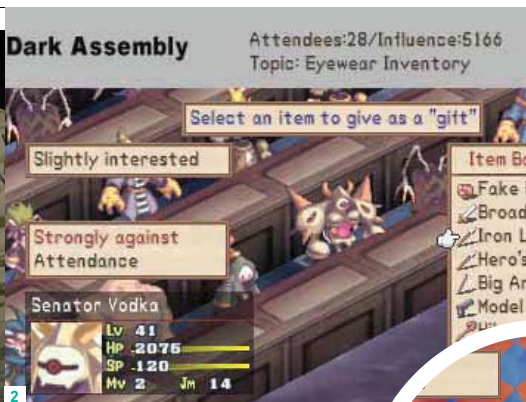
You're just a tiny stepping stone on my path to the throne.

CLASSIC GAME

Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness

The road to hell is paved with grid-based tiles





Turn-based strategy JRPGs always used to be serious affairs, telling tales of warring armies and heroic sacrifices. At least, they were until Nippon Ichi Software turned its hand to the genre in the early 2000s, led by irreverence, absurd humour, and a knack for binding together bizarre ideas. From that heady concoction was born Disgaea, the clown prince of strategy RPGs.

Nearly 20 years after its PS2 release, six mainline releases and numerous spin-offs down the road, there's still nothing quite like the first Disgaea. Its magic comes from two factors: unapologetic silliness and almost bottomless depth. On picking up the game, you might assume you're playing something light and undemanding thanks to its zany script and cartoon visuals. Hundreds of hours later, as your brain wrestles with the demands of another dungeon, you'll probably look back and smile at such naiveté.

Disgaea's outlandish story and characters definitely remain part of its appeal, however. The star of the show is

The story then steers into a number of amusingly unexpected turns thanks to a richly odd support cast, including Laharl's vassal Etna, an angel called Fionne who wants to find out if demons are capable of love, and a retro-futuristic trio from Earth – Gordon, Jennifer, and Thursday the robot. And, of course, no Disgaea would be complete without series mascots the Prinnyes, the long-suffering, penguin-like servants of the underworld.

GEO STORM

The long-term draw of Disgaea, though, lies elsewhere, in its flexible grid-based combat. Naturally, your squad of fighters can learn a plethora of attacks, special skills, and spells, but the aim is not simply to move and strike, but to arrange elaborate strings of techniques that execute in sequence and combine for surprisingly large damage numbers. Surround a foe with a few units, for instance, and you can create a chain of assaults, preferably with characters placed next to the attackers to add a support buff. Alternatively, if you need to cover space quickly, characters can pick up and throw one another.

“There’s still nothing like the first Disgaea. Its magic comes from two factors: unapologetic silliness and almost bottomless depth.”

Laharl, a prince of a demonic underworld who wakes up from a two-year slumber to discover his father, the king, is dead. With a range of evil pretenders closing in on the throne, he sets out to reassert his royal privilege and claim the title of Overlord. From this reversal of the typical RPG premise – you're effectively playing the arrogant, delusional villain – Disgaea pokes fun at genre tropes with a knowing wink. Upon meeting his first main opponent, for example, who refers to himself as 'Dark Adonis,' Laharl decides to call him 'Mid-boss' instead.

The most mind-melting decisions, though, are often prompted by the environment, especially when you go off track from story missions into Disgaea's infamous 'item world.' Here, you actually enter one of the weapons or items in your possession and find yourself inside a multi-floored dungeon. The further you progress through it, the stronger the bonus gear you acquire and the more powerful the item becomes. To get the biggest rewards, however, you need to master the game's biggest tactical conundrum – geo symbols.

- 1 Disgaea 1 Complete on PS4 includes high-res sprites.
- 2 Visit the Dark Assembly to unlock extra features – if the senators agree.
- 3 The humour is generally strong, though some jokes haven't aged so well.
- 4 Be careful when throwing prinnyes – they explode.
- 5 Hire a range of humans and monsters to be your henchmen.



INFO

PUB Koei
DEV Nippon Ichi Software
RELEASED 2004
GET IT NOW
 PS Store, £44.99 (PS4); Ebay, £15 (PS2)

NEED TO KNOW

- 1 The PSP version is subtitled Afternoon Of Darkness.
- 2 It includes a mode where Laharl dies and Etna is the main character.
- 3 Disgaea creator and NIS president Sohei Niikawa initially worked for the company in marketing.

Geo symbols are coloured pyramids that fill a single grid panel. When you throw one onto a coloured square it grants a special effect to all squares of that colour – making characters weaker or stronger, perhaps, or even invincible. These qualities often affect your attack plans, but an even bigger deal is that you can destroy geo symbols, and if you position enough of them correctly, cause chain reactions of destruction. It's a complex process, like precisely arranging dozens of dominoes so you can knock them all down with a single flick. But there are few strategic triumphs as satisfying as seeing the results, as one broken geo symbol leads to a total wipeout.

Ultimately, the post-story challenges may become a grind, but thanks to randomised levels in the item world, as your characters' levels roll into the hundreds and then into the thousands, it never feels stale. Far from a silly distraction, it provides more tactical depth than most strategy RPGs could dream of. Seriously. ■



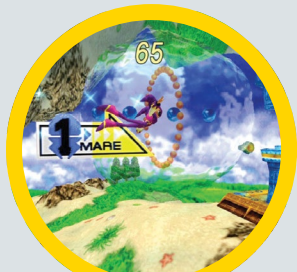
DON'T DELETE

Save icons for these historical October moments spin in the PLAY hive mind. Do you remember this?



5 YEARS

Assassin's Creed Origins follows protagonist Bayek of Siwa and his wife Aya as they search for answers in the wake of their son's death. Origins is remembered for bringing late-Ptolemaic Egypt to life at an impressive scale.



10 YEARS

Yuji Naka's Nights Into Dreams is a weird one. An HD rerelease of a remake that only came to PS2 in Japan, its European debut was digital-only on PS3. The jester-like mascot glides through the dreams of children to save the world and defeat the evil Wizeman.



15 YEARS

Folklore tasks you with waggling the Sixaxis for all you're worth to bag fairytale creatures. Twin protagonists Ellen and Keats follow the trail of a murder mystery, with many answers hidden in the realm of the dead.

MEMORY CARD

Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos

25 years young, this backpacker is still tail-whipping fun



The adorable Croc is voiced by British stage and screen actor Jonathan Aris.

Sonic, Tomb Raider, Mario... Croc? One of these things ain't like the others – despite the obvious cues it takes from the other three. The Nintendo connection is no accident either; this platformer began life as a prototype centring a totally different green reptile, namely Mario's pal Yoshi. Nintendo ultimately didn't go for it, leading developer Argonaut Software to retool the project into the underrated third-person 3D platformer we're celebrating here.

'Underrated' really is the word as reader @TruHopeFaith shares on Twitter: "I mention this game to people and they think I made it up. It feels not very well known." She adds, "But I remember it fondly as one of the first games I played on PlayStation."

GETTING UP-SCALED

Many have a special place in their heart for this scaly protagonist.

"Best platformer ever," @ByronB_86 quips. "If this is not added to PS+ Premium I will riot – or write a strongly worded letter to Mr. PlayStation."

Frédéric Dolbec Masson is also enthusiastic, saying, "[It's worth replaying,] if only for the music!!!! But the whole game is fire!!!"

"Loved playing this as a kid," Mitchell Barry shares. "Hopefully it gets remastered in the future."

@jpouterhaven expresses similar hopes: "I want Croc 1 and 2 remastered like Crash Bandicoot was. Loved the first game."



INFO

PUB FOX INTERACTIVE
DEV Argonaut Software
RELEASED ON PS1

RELEASE 1997
IF YOU LIKE THIS, TRY THIS...
Croc's inspirations are obvious, and you can still play many of them today. For more recent mascot platforming action, we'd recommend A Hat In Time, and Yooka-Laylee And The Impossible Lair.

▶ Join in the conversation as we celebrate PlayStation's past, present, and future with our community: you can email us at play@futurenet.com.

While no remaster project is officially in the works, it's not just the fans who'd like to see the reptile return. The founder of Argonaut Software, Jez San, tweeted back in 2020, "One day I'd like to remake it. I get inbound all the time from folks that want to do it. One day..."

Perhaps little crocodiles can dream.

BYTE SIZE BITS

Essential numbers that add together to tell you everything you need to know about the game.

3,000,000

Copies of Croc's debut adventure sold. It was one of Argonaut Software's best-selling titles at the time.

1994

When development of this 3D platformer began. It was Argonaut Software's first PlayStation project.

06

Tribble-esque Gobbos are hidden in every level. Finding them all is necessary for the final boss and true ending.



DEFENDING

Monokuma

Luke Kemp is bear-y sure that this murderous teddy isn't a load of pooh

This adorable little murderer is a mystery wrapped in an enigma wrapped in an unforgettable character design. A series of robots remote controlled by a human killer? A talking bear with a series of mechanical doubles? A sentient AI with an endless supply of self-destructing bear avatars? Three games later, we still don't know.

The third game serves only to deepen the mystery. Whoever or whatever Monokuma is, they are a killer. Of high school students, no less! Yet it's easy to forget (or, at least, deprioritise) this while playing *Danganronpa*. There's a playful yet malicious bounce to their voice, and that laugh – puhuhuhu! – is never far away. More important than the killing to Monokuma's identity, arguably, are the terrible puns that they throw all over the place. They'd fit right in at PLAY. You know, apart from the murdering and kidnapping.

That twisted humour is what makes the terrorising teddy equal parts appealing and frightening. Despite forcing a bunch of strangers into a deadly situation, Monokuma refuses to take it seriously. The whole thing is turned into a game, a series of actual murder mysteries that won't end until one person is left standing... or everybody is dead.

The killings – those committed by the cuddly mastermind, at least – are flamboyant, complicated, and infused with a dark humour. The bear personalises each according to the victim [*How... thoughtful?* – ed]. Monokuma's actions are impossible to defend, but the bear/robot/AI/person/whatever themselves? One of the most memorable villains in fiction, and very easy to celebrate.



IF YOU CAN FIGURE OUT 'WHODUNNIT', THEN ONLY THEY WILL RECEIVE PUNISHMENT! BUT, IF YOU PICK THE WRONG ONE, THEN I'LL PUNISH EVERYONE BESIDES THE BLACKENED."

Monokuma knows how to motivate you.



INFO

MAIN GAMES

Danganronpa:
Trigger
Happy Havoc,
Danganronpa 2:
Goodbye Despair,
Danganronpa V3:
Killing Harmony

STATS

Monokuma's English-language actor is Brian Beacock, who has also acted in anime including *Bleach* and *Naruto*.

Monokuma was, for some reason, used to help promote Seth MacFarlane's film *Ted* in Japan.

An early design of the character was a more human, and frankly more disturbing, figure.

SPIN-OFFS

Danganronpa
Another Episode:
Ultra Despair
Girls, Cyber
Danganronpa VR:
The Class Trial,
Danganronpa:
Unlimited Battle
(mobile, Japan
only, discontinued)

HOW TO PLAY?

Danganronpa 1/2
Reload (first two
games), £34.99,
PlayStation Store;
Danganronpa V3:
Killing Harmony,
£34.99, PlayStation
Store

TALKIN' 'BOUT CROSS- GENERATION

Alan Wen looks at the games released across different PlayStation generations with wild differences



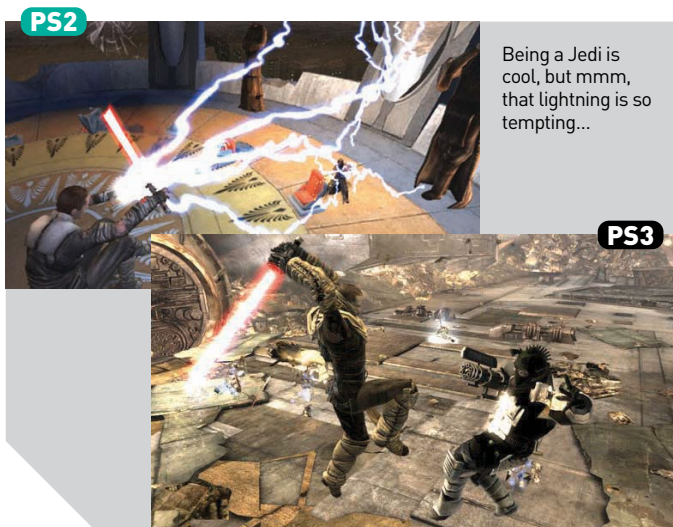
The force may have been unleashed across both PS2 and PS3, but the visuals remained leashed on the older hardware.

While transitioning to a new console generation it's not uncommon for publishers to continue supporting the previous one with a much larger established userbase. But while we've become used to being able to play

pretty much the same game but with a few improvements on a newer system with PS5 and PS4, it used to be a different story.

Before now, hardware leaps represented huge, fundamental shifts in how games were made, whether that was in the online elements, the move from standard definition to high definition, or

simply the power of the technology. That sometimes meant games released for the previous generation were missing features or were essentially different games, sometimes even made by different developers. Join us as we look at some of the most notable cross-gen games that had unique alter egos.



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

FORMAT PS3, PS2, PSP / **PUB** LUCASARTS
DEV LUCASARTS (PS3), KROME (PS2, PSP) / **RELEASED** 2008

01 Darth Vader's secret-apprentice-turned-Rebel-Alliance-founder Starkiller looked better on PS3, where it had the Ronin Engine to power its HD graphics. The PS2 version was handled by Krome, but also featured totally new levels – or rather it interspersed the campaign with Jedi trials that could only be unlocked on PS3 via DLC. This was because the concept of DLC only took off on PS3, which had an internal hard drive. PSP players got another bonus: exclusive levels based on iconic duels from the Star Wars saga.



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3

FORMAT PS2, PS1 / **PUB** ACTIVISION 02
DEV NEVERSOFT / **RELEASED** 2001

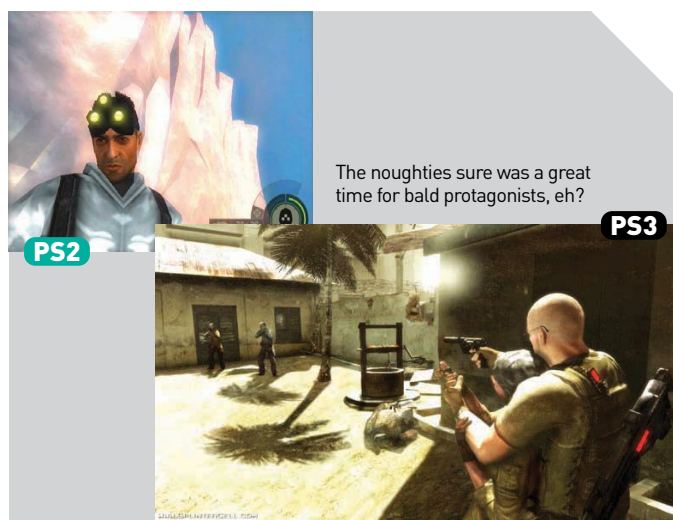
02 The Birdman's leap to PS2 didn't leave PS1 behind, although the latter was essentially a legacy port. It was developed using the same engine as THPS2, whereas the PS2 version used a new engine and ran at a smoother framerate. Much of the content was the same across both versions, although apart from the revert mechanic new tricks such as freestyling and lip trick combos were only possible on PS2. The other major difference was that the PS2 version supported online play – the first game on the console to do so.



Need For Speed: Undercover

FORMAT PS3, PS2, PSP / **PUB** EA / **DEV** AVALANCHE SOFTWARE (PS3), EXIENT ENTERTAINMENT (PS2), PIRANHA GAMES (PSP) / **RELEASED** 2008

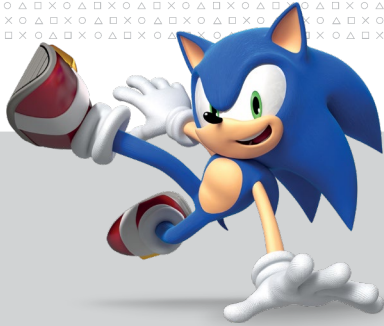
03 Here's a rarity: a case where an older-gen game was actually better than the one made for the newer console. The PS3 version may have boasted widescreen HD graphics and more cars, but the extra features like cross traffic seemed to result in consistently worse framerates compared to the PS2 version. If you played on PS2, you also got other features like the Challenge Series mode, the option to unlock and race in police cars, and more importantly, splitscreen multiplayer. Sure, you could play online on PS3, but nothing beats good old split-screen.



Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent

FORMAT PS3, PS2 / **PUB** UBISOFT / **DEV** UBISOFT MILAN/UBISOFT SHANGHAI (PS3), UBISOFT MONTRÉAL (PS2) / **RELEASED** 2006

04 Given Sam Fisher's experience varied depending on which console you played on, Double Agent was an apt title. While Ubisoft's Milan and Shanghai teams built a custom engine for the PS3 version, Montréal stuck with the previous games' engine. This resulted in two very different games despite sharing a similar plot in which Fisher goes undercover shortly after mourning the death of his daughter. While they covered some of the same locations, the levels' design and plot twists varied drastically, including one pivotal decision that affected the ending in the PS3 version but not the PS2 one.



PS3

The God Of War-like werehog action wasn't *that* bad, just not what you'd expect or want from a Sonic game.

PS2



Sonic Unleashed

FORMAT PS3, PS2 / PUB SEGA / DEV SONIC TEAM (PS3), SONIC TEAM & DIMPS (PS2) / RELEASED 2008

05

After ushering the Blue Blur into a new generation with the 2006 reboot proved a disaster, Sega

decided its mascot would work across generations for the followup.

But just as Sonic would turn from his iconic form into a larger, meaner-looking werehog, the PS3 and PS2 versions were night and day in how they looked and played.

The daytime stages incorporated both 3D movement and side-scrolling elements plus a new quickstep mechanic across both games. Dimps, known for its work on

handheld Sonic games, assisted with the daytime stage design on the PS2 version, though that edition ended up with fewer of these stages and more of the slower, combat-oriented night time ones where you're a werehog.

Fighting felt different on PS2 as you had a button for each of the

whereas on PS3 this was just one long gauge you could hit whenever you needed it. Perhaps the biggest difference was that medals were awarded to you based on your rank on PS2, whereas on PS3 they were placed around levels as collectibles.

The PS3 version was made on the

Hedgehog Engine (as used to make recent Sonic titles), which was more powerful than PS2 could handle, so the latter relied on prerendered cutscenes.

“The PS3 and PS2 versions were night and day in how they looked and played.”

werehog's arms, while other inputs, such as for running or grabbing enemies, were also different. In daytime stages you needed to collect enough rings to fill up individual bars to use Sonic's boost mechanic,

And instead of having explorable hubs like on PS3, PS2 players were reduced to navigating a menu with portraits of NPCs. All that means completionists need to finish two werehog adventures, not one. Sorry!

PS2



Good luck using a palm tree for cover. On PS3, the world really does feel at war, with brown filters aplenty.

PS3



Call Of Duty: World At War

FORMAT PS3, PS2 / PUB ACTIVISION / DEV TREYARCH (PS3), REBELLION (PS2) / RELEASED 2008

05

This wasn't actually Call Of Duty's first cross-gen release – that honour goes to

2006's Call Of Duty 3, which also served as a PS3 launch title.

However, two years on, you might have assumed the series' first title that moves into the Black Ops storyline would be a generation exclusive.

Instead, World At War would be the final Call Of Duty release for PS2, although it wasn't handled by Treyarch but outsourced to Rebellion, which developed it using its own

custom in-house engine, Asura, with this game getting the additional subtitle 'Final Front'.

Whereas the PS3 version had you play American and Soviet campaigns from the Pacific and East European theatres of war respectively, Final Front's campaign was totally different,

you playing as a mixture of American and British soldiers during the Battle Of The Bulge as well as taking over Hitler's birthplace in Austria.

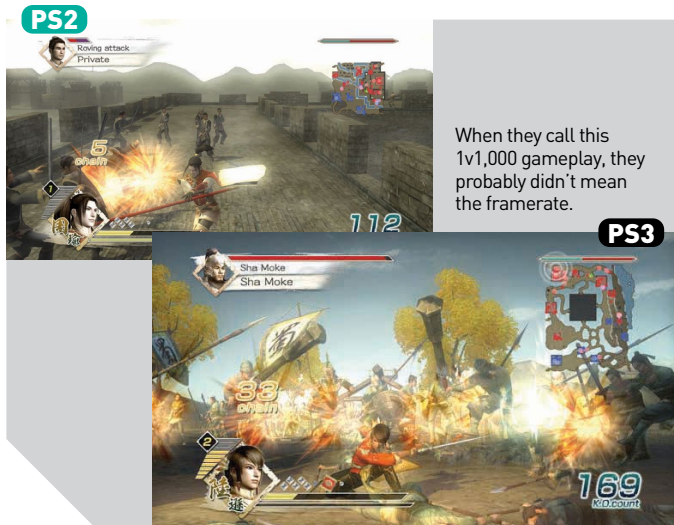
With 13 missions, Final Front was a sizeable campaign, although it was restricted in some ways. For example, its tank mission was on

rails rather than free-roaming like on PS3. And that was your lot, as you got none of the multiplayer options, such as co-op, split-screen, and online

multiplayer, that were available on PS3. On PS3 World At War introduced the series staple of a Zombies multiplayer mode, which was missing from the PS2 version.

“On PS3 World At War introduced a series staple: Zombies mode.”

with a new set of characters (although the American soldiers you play as in both versions share the surname Miller). Instead of the Soviets, the European missions saw

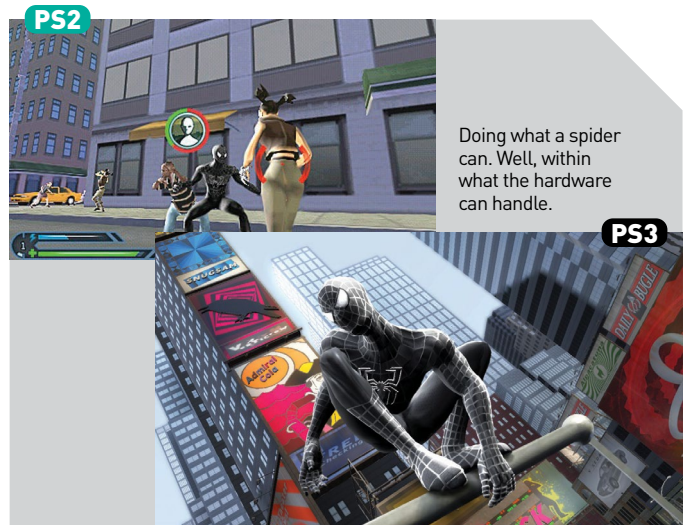


When they call this 1v1,000 gameplay, they probably didn't mean the framerate.

Dynasty Warriors 6

FORMAT PS3, PS2 / **PUB** KOEI
DEV OMEGA FORCE / **RELEASED** 2008

07 Despite arriving some months after the PS3 version was released, the PS2 version of this musou entry actually had extra content, in the form of additional characters with different weapons and movesets so that they weren't just reskins, plus additional levels. These extras, however, weren't enough to compensate for the fact that the outdated hardware simply couldn't handle the scale of the enormous battles, with PS2 suffering from lots of heavy slowdown and poorer graphics. Abilities you had on PS3, such as duelling and swimming, were also cut from this port.

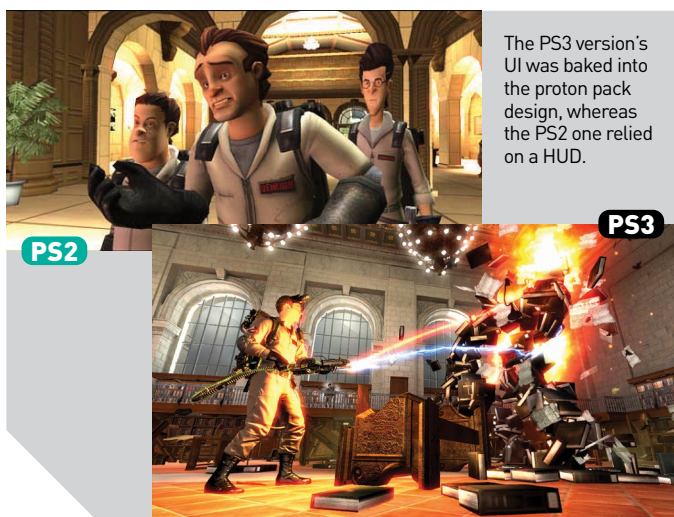


Doing what a spider can. Well, within what the hardware can handle.

Spider-Man 3

FORMAT PS3, PS2, PSP / **PUB** ATARI / **DEV** TREYARCH (PS3), VICARIOUS VISIONS (PS2, PSP) / **RELEASED** 2007

08 Tying in with the Sam-Raimi-directed film of the same name, this cross-gen release was no doubt aimed at reaching as broad an audience of Spidey fans as possible, though the major differences between the two console versions drew a lot of criticism at the time. Most significant was that on PS2 combat was largely ground-based, whereas on PS3 you could swing around in the open world. Sticking to the plot of the movie, on PS3 you couldn't remove the symbiote suit once you had it, whereas on PS2 you could, and in fact wearing it for too long would lead to a game over.



The PS3 version's UI was baked into the proton pack design, whereas the PS2 one relied on a HUD.

Ghostbusters: The Video Game

FORMAT PS3, PS2, PSP / **PUB** ATARI INTERACTIVE / **DEV** TERMINAL REALITY (PS3), RED FLY STUDIO (PS2, PSP) / **RELEASED** 2009

09 Who you gonna call? The most obvious difference between the two generations of Ghostbusters is that on PS3 the iconic foursome were modelled on the film's actors, who also provided the voices, whereas on the older tech the game had a more cartoonish look. That said, you got to pick your gender as the rookie protagonist in the PS2 and PSP versions. The campaigns also differed in level design, UI, and mechanics, but more importantly, multiplayer was only available on the PS3 version via online.



Other sports titles continued to be released on PS2 past its sell-by date, including FIFA's major rival PES.

FIFA 14

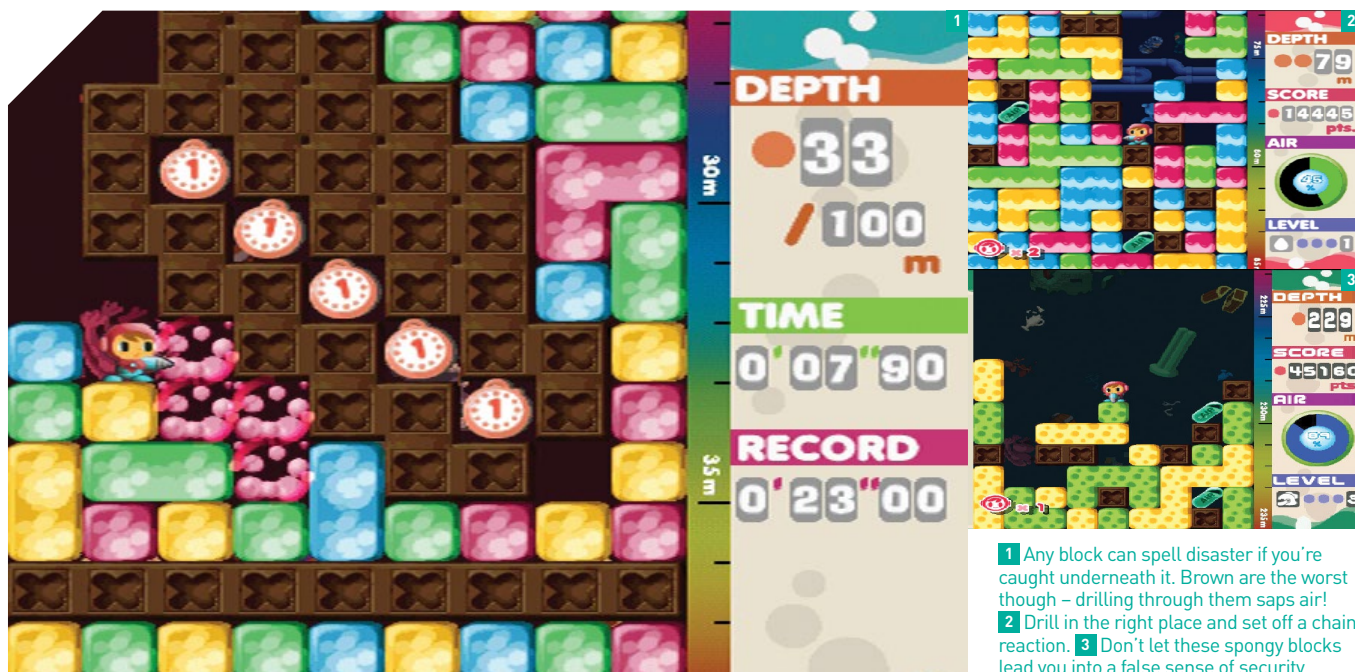
FORMAT PS4, PS3, PS2, PSP, PSV / **PUB** EA SPORTS
DEV EA CANADA / **RELEASED** 2013

10 With 14 instalments released on PS2, EA truly committed to supporting FIFA fans who hadn't upgraded their console for years with legacy editions of its annual footie release, which boiled down to little more than updating the player rosters and stats, while the graphics stayed about a decade old. FIFA 14 was unusual not only for being the final FIFA game released for PS2 but also for being released across three PlayStation generations, with the PS4 version using the Ignite engine, introducing more advanced AI and 'True Player Motion'.

PLUS POINTS

Mr. Driller

Plumbing the depths and unearthing a classic



- 1 Any block can spell disaster if you're caught underneath it. Brown are the worst though – drilling through them saps air!
- 2 Drill in the right place and set off a chain reaction.
- 3 Don't let these spongy blocks lead you into a false sense of security.

This began life as an arcade game¹ before swiftly moving to the original PlayStation, and the action is addictive enough to have us coming back for just one more go over two decades later on PS5. The setup for this bright puzzle game is refreshingly straightforward: the city has been overtaken by colourful blocks – are you a bad enough dude to get to the bottom of it?

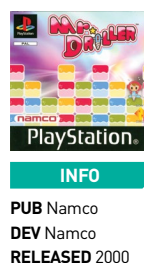
Part of PlayStation Plus' Classics Catalogue, which is available exclusively to Premium tier subscribers, Mr. Driller's central challenge is no-frills but still mesmerising. You drill down (and left and right) through the blocks, which are

constantly stacking up. In addition to you destroying blocks, if four come together through falling as a result of your drilling, they're destroyed.

Your descent goes through a few different phases, and in your race to the bottom you've got to outpace not just falling blocks but your own dwindling air supply. Scavenging precious air requires no small amount of strategic thinking as more obstacles arise in your downward path. Of course, there was no PS Plus rewind in arcades but there's certainly no shame in using it now!

CAN YOU DIG IT?

Make no mistake, later series releases make this first offering look rather limited in retrospect. Here, you only have



INFO

PUB Namco
DEV Namco
RELEASED 2000

the choice of beating your score in Arcade, Time Attack, or Survival mode, plus either a 2,500 feet or 5,000 feet challenge – there's no multiplayer mode (something it was criticised for on its original release). But the jagged, compressed edges of its adorable art, along with the absolutely banging soundtrack by prolific composer Go Shiina,² easily gets its hooks back in us. Besides all that, freefalling through blocks and snatching up an oh-so-precious tank of air when you need it most is one of those clutch moments we've yet to tire of. Fire up your drill, Susumu Hori, we're going back in!

FOOTNOTES 1 The prototype was called Dig Dug 3 before becoming its own thing. 2 On PlayStation, you can hear his work most recently in Code Vein and God Eater 3.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Readers tell us what they think of our choice



LOVE MR. DRILLER! IT'S ANNOYING WHEN YOU DIE [AND YOU'RE] NEARLY [AT] THE END – BUT IT KEEPS YOU PLAYING."

Tony Mattie



YES, I HAVE [BEEN PLAYING IT VIA PS PLUS]. YES, IT DOES MOSTLY [HOLD UP]."

@Dazatron22



I OWN THE PHYSICAL DISC. WOULD BE NICE TO HAVE A WAY OF PLAYING IT ON MODERN HARDWARE WITHOUT A SUBSCRIPTION FEE."

Daniel Reid

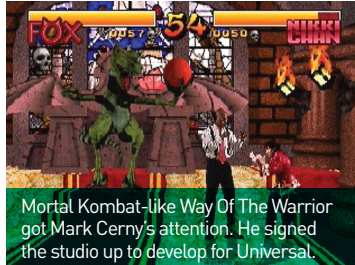
► We permit **No Heroes Allowed!** to light up PS Plus.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF Naughty Dog

PlayStation's best friend has been around since the beginning



Naughty Dog's first project was a 16-bit RPG for EA, *Rings of Power*. Never rereleased, it's since become a rarity.



Mortal Kombat-like *Way of the Warrior* got Mark Cerny's attention. He signed the studio up to develop for Universal.



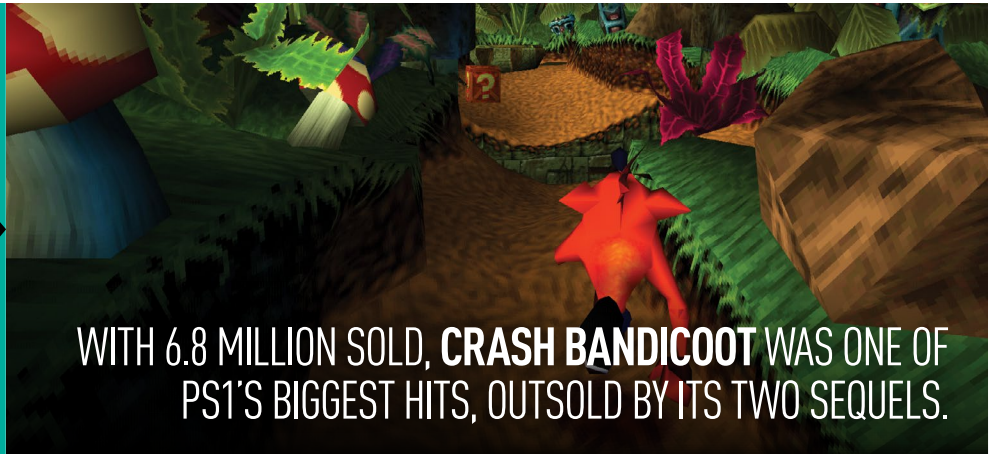
Between CTR and *Jak X*, Naughty Dog has a reputation for kart racers. When will Nathan Drake join the race?

Reformed from JAM Software in 1989. Sony purchased it in 2001 to focus on first-party games like *Jak*. **Controversially, the studio has long shunned having producers.** It never made a PSP/Vita game – spin-offs were handled by other devs.

CRASH TEST

Everybody jump around

Signed to Universal by Mark Cerny, Naughty Dog wanted to use the position to crack 3D platformers. Professional cartoonists worked on *Crash*'s design, and impressive programming pushed PS1 like nothing else. Advanced texture compression and visual calculations meant a lot of visible detail, and the impression of a huge, vibrant platformer world.



WITH 6.8 MILLION SOLD, **CRASH BANDICOOT** WAS ONE OF PS1'S BIGGEST HITS, OUTSOLD BY ITS TWO SEQUELS.



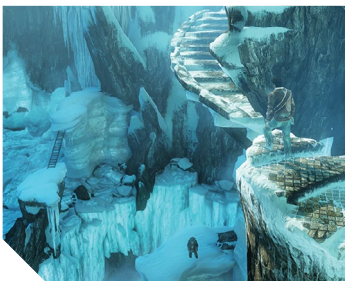
■ *TLOU* was the first time ND had two full teams working on multiple projects.



■ *Jak and Daxter* had an impressively seamless open world back on PS2.



■ The studio got its online multiplayer start with *Uncharted 2*, which featured both co-op missions and rather excellent competitive modes.



■ Home of the ICE (Initiative for a Common Engine) team, ND creates shared tools that unify Sony's first-party studios. It's incredibly important.

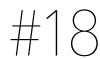


BEYOND GAMING

From one screen to another

The likes of spin-off comics are not enough: Naughty Dog has become PlayStation Studios' spearhead for both the big and small screen. This year's *Uncharted* movie has been one of the most successful videogame movies ever, and next year's *The Last of Us* HBO show looks like it'll land with a bang. Will *Jak and Daxter* be next?

► Next issue: we get picky, and choose **choice-based narrative** games



Horizon Zero Dawn throws us up against Redmaw, a notorious war machine with no time for hunters

NEXT MONTH

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GENSHIN IMPACT

Where will the free-to-play adventure head next?

PLAY

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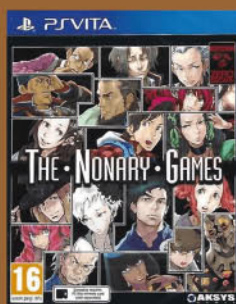
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PLAY
PRESENTS



Grand Theft Auto

The Ultimate Companion



GTA: THE TOP 100

From PS1 to PS5, we snatch on every criminally good moment

GTA ONLINE

There's never been a better time to build your criminal enterprise: we show you how

GTA: THE HISTORY

Paying our respects to the entire crime family





Crime spree

The GTA Top 100

Jeremy Peel thought he was out, but **Grand Theft Auto** dragged him right back in. He's combed the streets of Liberty City, Los Santos, and beyond for the best of everything, from iconic moments to unforgettable radio stations

Something about **Grand Theft Auto** digs into your brain. Whether it's the gleeful moments of parody that send up American crime classics, the freedom to go on a rampage across an open world urban sandbox, or little cinematic touches that remind you Rockstar's characters go beyond surface level, it's almost impossible to forget.

It's impressive in part because every GTA is huge. Even if you go back to the very first game in the series on PS1, you'll find a sweeping, expansive ambition that remains incredibly moreish, your path through a city very much your own. And yet, so much sticks with you. To celebrate it, we've cracked the window on every game in the series in order to rummage through all those shiny memories, and stashed the best of the best right in our boot for you to have a gander at.

Taking Chop for a walk

GAME GTA V / RELEASED 2013 / FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

100

Easily the strangest protagonist in GTA history – briefly controllable in single-player, and during a GTA Online Halloween event – Chop is a rottweiler notable for his loyalty in a game full of double-crossings. In fact, the only crossing he does is over the roads near the Clinton Residence should you throw his ball too far. His companionship is welcome when the plot starts blowing up, even if he's behaving badly because you didn't bother to train him via the iFruit app.

But go the other way and you can put plenty of time into building the bond between man and best friend, making sure that Franklin shows love and care to his stalwart companion. Ditch all the

crime and take a trip down to Vespucci Beach where you can go for walkies and play fetch.

While some of GTA's detractors will call the series a hedonistic sandbox that brings out the worst in players, it's hard to believe that after we've

spent a good hour hanging out with our canine pal. For as sinful as your GTA life can be, it can also be quite mindful. Why not put the weapons away, dutifully park your convertible, and hit the sands with Chop while you take in some digital sun?

Man's best friend briefly becomes a playable protagonist. Could GTA6 have an all-dog cast?

"Notable for his loyalty in a game full of double-crossings – the only crossing he does is over the road."



Blasting your ice cream van's jingle

i **GAME** GTA: VICE CITY / **RELEASED** 2002
FORMAT PS5 PS4 PS2



f **GAME** GTA V / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5 PS4 PS3

97 The act of hitting the ocean bed near Los Santos in your submersible might be driven purely by greed – as hazardous as it might be, nuclear waste fetches a high price, and that means more moolah to put towards your next field hangar or golf club. But once you're down there, you discover that some of Los Santos' beauty lies there, below sea level, brightly coloured and alien.

It's the lone chunk of on-land coral reef, however, found halfway up a mountain, that has bewitched players – for nine years and counting.



Watching Michael's movie at the cinema

i GAME GTA V / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3



GAME GTA III-V / **RELEASED** 2001-2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3, PS2

94 There are a couple of entertaining yet unusable camera options in GTA III.

There's the '90s-style top-down view that's a recipe for flipped vehicles, but best of all is the cinematic camera – a favourite feature of Sam Houser, who was determined that GTA should look and feel like the crime movies of his childhood. The view periodically switches between various cool and flattering angles, all pretty much guaranteeing a gnarly crash. The very definition of style over sense.

GTA's greatest business names

Deliver Me Timbers

GAME GTA IV / **RELEASED** 2008
FORMAT PS3

93 Just a straight-up great name for a company in the business of logging and logistics. You'll spot it on a passing van, and that's about it. A throwaway line, and funnier for it.



Sex Club 7

GAME GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES
RELEASED 2005 / **FORMAT** PS2, PSP

92 You had to be living in the UK between the years of 1998 and 2003 to know why this was naughty – it's a reference to post-Spice Girls pop group S Club 7.



Ammu-Nation

GAME GTA III / **RELEASED** 2001
FORMAT PS2

91 Rockstar North's outsider perspective on the US has served it well, and you can't argue with this simple, damning jab at the country where there are 120 owned guns for every 100 citizens.



Pisswasser

GAME GTA V / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

90 'Wasser' is German for water, and you can work out the rest. Cheap lager made for export, with the slogan 'You're in for a good time'. You're in. Yep.



Bawsaq

GAME GTA V / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

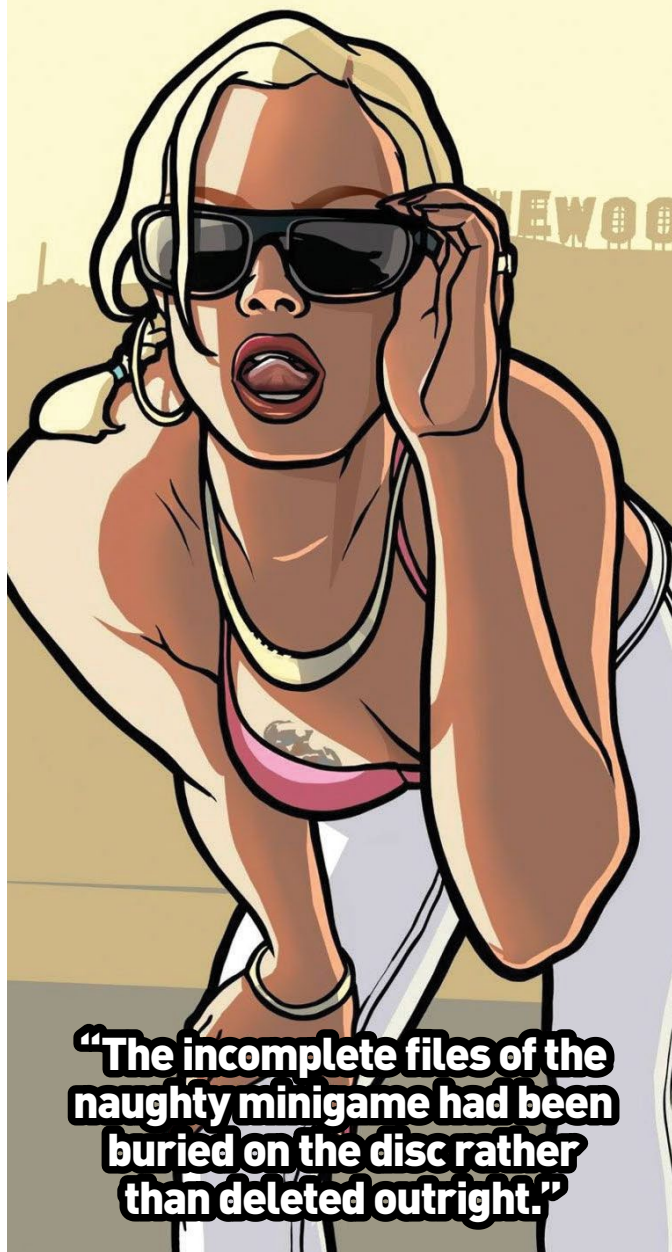
89 You can buy stocks in Pisswasser on Bawsaq, the home of GTA V's stock market. Never has Rockstar's Scottish heritage been more apparent than in this play on the name of New York's own Nasdaq.

BAWSAQ

Hot Coffee

GAME GTA: SAN ANDREAS / **RELEASED** 2004 / **FORMAT** PS2

88 All it took was a fan combing files to find cut content to cause of one gaming's biggest-ever controversies. On the trail of unused animations, 'hot coffee' turned out to be a cartoonish sex minigame, in which CJ has to rhythmically spank his girlfriend to elicit maximum excitement. Chaos ensued as, though the minigame was inaccessible to the casual player, the incomplete files had been buried on the disc rather than deleted outright. Many fingers were pointed, and Senator Hillary Clinton called for new legislation to ban the sale of violent and sexually explicit games to American children, with a \$5,000 fine for retailers in breach of the law.



Getting really into talk radio

GAME GTA III / **RELEASED** 2001
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS2

87 The nascent Rockstar North dabbled in surrealist comedy radio in GTA2, but it was only when the series went 3D that it dedicated entire channels to the kind of weird, rambling dialogues you can hear on local phone-in shows in real life. Eventually, the madness seeps in, and you find yourself sitting quietly in a sedan as a mafioso vents about his overbearing mother. "I do a man's job and all," sighs Toni, "but she treats me like a little boy."



Walking away from the Chainsaw Masquerade

GAME GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES
RELEASED 2005 / **FORMAT** PS2, PSP

86 Manhunt was a recent memory when Liberty City Stories came out, and there are a couple of creepy echoes during the latter's runtime. First, a character covertly films you taking out Sindacco goons so that he can use the footage in a snuff film. And second, Rockstar Leeds stages a survival horror showdown in the bowels of a cargo ship. The tension builds in the hollow vessel, until you're ambushed by baddies carrying more power tools than your local hardware store. Brr.



i **GAME** GTA: LONDON 1969 / **RELEASED** 1999 / **FORMAT** PS1

85 By setting this early spin-off in a very specific time and place, Rockstar basically promised a playable Italian Job – and it delivered. The Myini, as it's called, may only be 135 pixels from its bonnet to its boot, but offers the best acceleration

in the game. That's no small matter when yet another head-on collision takes away all your momentum. Looking to test drive it? There's ample room at the centrally located Hyde Park, and the pigeons there present little resistance. It might seem quaint now, but the simple

rendition of London was a joy to putter around in frenzied style, thanks in part to the design of UK cities, and also the novelty of having a game set in our home country for once. It'd be nice to have the series visit our shores again one day. God knows there isn't *a lot* more to lampoon now.



i **GAME** GRAND THEFT AUTO
RELEASED 1997 / **FORMAT** PS1

84 The oldest GTA games had a unique, often forgotten scoring system that's reminiscent of those in today's roguelikes. The more successive missions you completed, the higher your cash multiplier – massively increasing your chances of hitting the level goal and opening up a new city.



f **GAME** GTA: SAN ANDREAS
RELEASED 2004 / **FORMAT** PS5, PS4, PS3, PS2

83 San Andreas introduced a surprising number of RPG-style stats that influenced protagonist CJ's abilities, but none was more visible than his weight. Though Carl began the game looking as trim as rapper Young Maylay, upon whose appearance his was based, he'd pile on the pounds if you sent him to Cluckin' Bell too regularly. Before long, running and jumping would become a problem, and life in Las Venturas started to feel like a lesson for those of us who'd spent too much time on the couch, lifting nothing heavier than a controller. As in real life, running and exercise machines would put him right.



i **GAME** GTA: LONDON 1969
RELEASED 1999 / **FORMAT** PS1

82 There was no reward for messing up sacred British establishments in GTA: London – the buildings were no more destructible back then than they are in the series today. But the mere presence of Her Maj’s digs in a hedonistic videogame prompted transgressive acts, particularly when that videogame handed you a bazooka.

Sadly, Grand Theft Auto hasn't returned to London in its 3D era, but Watch Dogs: Legion is on standby should you feel the need to launch any more missiles outside the windows of the royals.

GTA: THE ULTIMATE COMPANION



Lamar picks you up from the airport

GAME GTA ONLINE / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

81 Those who played GTA Online as a male character missed out on a standout appearance from Los Santos' funniest resident. Should you be playing a female character, Franklin's foil and all-round-clown Lamar Davis shows up at Arrivals to greet you with a single red rose, only to realise within seconds that this online relationship isn't going to go the way he'd hoped. A mute protagonist gives GTA V's biggest talker more space than ever to run his mouth, and without Franklin to keep him in check, things swiftly get daft. But romance is *not* on the cards.



Drive the bus fast or it'll blow

GAME GRAND THEFT AUTO
RELEASED 1997 / **FORMAT** PS1

80 The coach looks innocuous enough, parked in a New Jersey-like area of Liberty City. It could almost be ready for a party of daytripping pensioners. Hop inside, though, and you'll discover a terrifying tribute to Speed, the 1994 Keanu Reeves film in which police desperately try to defuse a bomb on a bus that will detonate if the vehicle's speed drops below 50 miles per hour. Keeping up the pace while your pals work to disable the radio receiver is no mean feat in top-down streets with little warning about the traffic coming up ahead.



Finding the ElectroGun

GAME GTA2 / **RELEASED** 1999
FORMAT PS1

79 The second GTA actually falls under the definition of science fiction, being set in a near future when US cities are battlegrounds for ruthless pharmaceutical companies and clone-makers. You could be forgiven for forgetting that fact while carjacking and machine-gunning your way through the game in the usual fashion, but the ElectroGun provides a jolting reminder that this is not the world you know. Aiming is tough in GTA2, and so chain lightning is a welcome tool... which leaves fizzing, prone skeletons in its wake. Dystopian.



Buying a high-end apartment

GAME GTA ONLINE / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

78 While the series has long laughed at the quest for material gain that drives so much of US society, GTA Online has the goods to satisfy your soul if you covet flashy status symbols. And vehicles are not enough. No sports car is more aspirational than the Hollywood Hills mansions for sale on the Dynasty 8 website, and finally buying one after months of small-time crime feels like a real punctuation point. It helps that high-end apartments also unlock heists, the endgame activities that deliver the real meat of GTA Online's story.



Getting a respray

GAME GTA (SERIES) / **RELEASED** 1997-2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3, PS2, PS1, PSP

77 There's lots that doesn't make sense about the respray system in GTA. A quick paint job helps you avoid the consequences of your lawbreaking. But hang on, don't you need to change the number plates too? And how did the cops lose you when they saw you enter the garage? Ah, but those are mere details. You can't beat the palpable sense of relief as five stars vanish instantly – nor the sudden improvement in performance when a knackered ride's instantly restored to rude health with a lick of paint. A bit of trivia for you: while the garages were later called Pay 'n' Spray, in GTA2 they were named Max Paynt.



Crashing head-first through the windshield

GAME GTA IV / **RELEASED** 2008
FORMAT PS3

76 GTA IV's leap toward greater realism was a shock most deeply felt in its driving model. Less Driver and more Gran Turismo, it punished you for trying to take a corner at breakneck speed – often by, well, breaking your neck. Seeing your car's momentum transferred straight to Niko, who was hurled through the glass and against the scenery, was a traumatic moment for many in their first days with next-gen GTA. The harsh experience certainly taught us a lesson, though.



Hearing Billie Jean playing on the radio

GAME GTA: VICE CITY / **RELEASED** 2002
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS2

75 Contrary to popular belief, Vice City wasn't the first GTA game to feature licensed music on its radio – that was GTA: London 1969, whose soundtrack was stuffed with period reggae. But newly flush with cash, Rockstar made a statement by filling Vice City with big-name artists, including MJ. The game introduced teenagers of the early noughties to the king of pop's trademark shuffle, and set the stage for a place where pastel suits weren't just accepted, they were encouraged.



Greatest cameos



Dr Dre

GAME GTA ONLINE / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

74 San Andreas made g-funk interactive, so it's no surprise Rockstar is into Dre, but it was still a shock to see him crop up in the Cayo Perico Heist.



Samuel L Jackson

GAME GTA: SAN ANDREAS
RELEASED 2004
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3, PS2

73 For those too young for Pulp Fiction, Sam Jackson will always be villainous Officer Tenpenny: a gangster with a badge.



Iggy Pop

GAME GTA IV / **RELEASED** 2008
FORMAT PS3

72 "Have a nice day sucking the corporate cock," says Iggy on Liberty Rock Radio. A year after GTA IV he was starring in car insurance ads, but we'll let it slide.



Ricky Gervais

GAME GTA IV / **RELEASED** 2008
FORMAT PS3

71 Appears at the Split Sides comedy club in Liberty City. Not someone we'd pay to see, but taking in a show within a game was novel for the time.



Phil Collins

GAME GTA: VICE CITY STORIES
RELEASED 2006 / **FORMAT** PS2, PSP

70 An '80s icon comes to Vice City for a full performance of In The Air Tonight. He even does the drum bit, so there's something here for all generations.

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GTA: THE ULTIMATE COMPANION



Was it a coincidence the followup allowed you to blitz around Westminster itself? Probably... but it was still great fun.

Grand Theft Auto is condemned in the House Of Lords

GAME GRAND THEFT AUTO / **RELEASED** 1997 / **FORMAT** PS1

69 Grand Theft Auto was declared a public menace before the series even began, and that's just how its creators planned it. The marketing team at BMG Interactive hired Max Clifford, the notorious publicist later found guilty of indecent assault, who at the time was famous for feeding stories to the UK tabloid press.

The decision was unconventional for a games company, and worried the owner of GTA's developer, David Jones, but future Rockstar head Sam Houser was keen to make a splash and show that Grand Theft Auto was no child's toy.

Clifford whispered in the ear of the elite, and within three months Grand Theft Auto had infiltrated the wood-paneled

walls of the British establishment. On 20 May 1997 a former Scottish Secretary spoke in the House Of Lords about a shocking new game made in his country that featured hit-and-runs and police chases. "There would be nothing to stop children from buying it," said Lord Campbell of Croy. "We simply cannot allow children and young people to be given the idea that car crime or joyriding is in

assassination"; the Scottish Motor Trade Association said the game would "make children think it is okay to rob cars and kill." BMG's marketers, meanwhile, pulled clips from the House Of Lords debate for its radio ad campaign, capitalising on the image of GTA as something illicit, outrageous, and therefore essential.

The BBFC ultimately ruled that although GTA's subject matter

was unprecedented, it wouldn't be banned. And ironically, the concern over members of the public getting their

hands on the game ensured that they did, to the tune of 500,000 copies sold. GTA cost a million pounds to make, and had soon made £25 million, ensuring a sequel. Though GTA's notoriety would cause more problems later, that controversy was also the making of the series.

"We simply cannot allow children to be given the idea that car crime is acceptable."

any way an acceptable or an enjoyable thing to do." He called on the BBFC to look into whether GTA should be legal to release.

WRITE BY

After that, the free promotion rolled in. The Daily Mail claimed GTA would include "illegal alien

Michael and Franklin pull down a house

GAME GTA V / **RELEASED** 2013 / **FORMAT** PS5, PS4, PS3

59 The player characters start GTA V primed for change. Michael is bored by financial comfort, and Franklin is hungry for more of it. But the story can't kick into gear until the pair get into real trouble, and that comes in the form of Marriage Counseling, the mission in which they tear down a house in the hills in retaliation for Michael's cuckolding. The spectacle is only outdone by the twist: the home belongs to a cartel boss.

This simple act of rage-fuelled vengeance is spectacular to behold, the game asking us to

push down the accelerator as we watch it crumble bit by bit, but also a catalyst. Now you owe some very bad people a lot of money, which means there's

only one thing for it. The life of crime calls once again. Though, you can't help feeling that one way or another Michael would have found some excuse to spice up his life once again, and dragged Franklin along for the ride all the way.

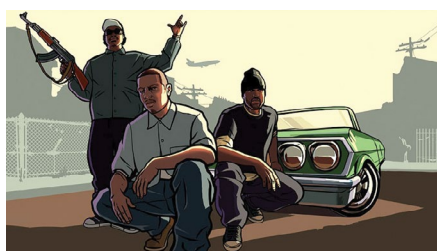


Ever the lover of classic movies, Michael's had one too many Lethal Weapon marathons.

Seeing GTA IV's debut trailer

GAME GTA IV / **RELEASED** 2008
FORMAT PS3

58 Following a 28-day countdown, the mere sight of GTA in its new, realistic HD form was breath-taking. Then the choir gave way, time slowed, and the heavy, staccato voice of Niko Bellic was heard for the first time. "Life is complicated," he said. "I killed people, smuggled people, sold people. Perhaps here, things will be different." It was shocking for two reasons. First, Niko was an immigrant protagonist, and a former Yugoslavian one at that, in a country that still defaulted to Eastern European accents for its villains. Second, although GTA had played with darkness before, it had never adopted a tone as bleak as this. Almost unbelievable at the time, watching it still produces a tingle to this day.



Fighting for your patch

GAME GTA: SAN ANDREAS / **RELEASED** 2004
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3, PS2

57 GTA has rarely given you much freedom in how and where you take the fight to your enemies, which is why San Andreas' gang warfare system stands out even today, nearly two decades after the game's release. The struggle between the Ballas, Los Santos Vagos, and Grove Street Families is one you can influence yourself by stepping into hostile territory and opening fire, triggering waves of opponents and starting a gang war in that location. Expanding the area under Grove Street's influence becomes a personal mission and gives you a stake in the streets, just like CJ.

Lindsay Lohan sues Rockstar

GAME GTA V / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

56 A bizarre episode in gaming history that took four years to resolve. Judges in New York's Court Of Appeals unanimously rejected actress Lindsay Lohan's claim that two residents of Los Santos – both Lacey Jonas, the actress character harangued by paparazzi in a random event, and the beach-going blonde lady depicted in a GTA V loading screen – were based on her. "The ambiguous representations in question are nothing more than cultural comment that is not recognisable as plaintiff," ruled Judge Eugene M Fahey.



GTA's greatest music stations

Blonded Los Santos 97.8 FM

GAME GTA ONLINE
RELEASED 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3



55 Frank Ocean and friends play spaced-out, soulful music that runs the gamut of contemporary genres, while riffing on the surrealism of GTA's casual ultraviolence between songs. Proof of Rockstar's cool.

Soulwax FM

GAME GTA V
RELEASED 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3



54 Hosted by the legendary Belgian techno group of the same name, this 42-minute mix constitutes what has to be the best driving playlist ever conceived for stolen sports cars. Boosts your chance of winning races.



Heavenly Radio

GAME GTA 2 / RELEASED 1999
FORMAT PS1

53 The home of Hare Krishna conversion, and the only place playing "the sounds of whale love to help Saturn's moon squeeze through Neptune's tight red eye." Strange comedy.

Heavy Heavy Monster Sound

GAME GTA:
LONDON 1969
RELEASED 1999 / FORMAT PS1



52 Back in the '90s, each GTA radio station consisted of only two songs – but the uplifting Hammond organ sound of Harry J Allstars' reggae instrumental, Liquidator, sounded perfect on repeat.

V-Rock

GAME GTA:
VICE CITY
RELEASED 2002
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS2



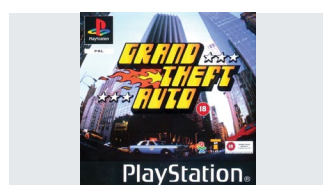
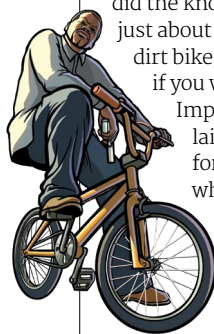
51 Even Lazlow's egotistical mutterings can't detract from a compilation uniting the cheesy stomp of Twisted Sister, Quiet Riot's wall of sound, and Slayer's apocalyptic arpeggiating.



Niko's final choice

GAME GTA IV / RELEASED 2008
FORMAT PS3

50 Can you put a price on principle? That's the surprisingly worthy question at the end of GTA IV, which asks you to make a binary decision about whether to go through with a dirty deal. In some ways, what you're offered is a false choice – Niko loses somebody important to him either way, and finds there's no escaping revenge in a business where bad blood inevitably leads to bad bloodshed. It's a perpetual theme of gangster fiction: in the end, nobody gets to simply walk away.



The Grand Theft Auto rap

GAME GRAND THEFT AUTO
RELEASED 1997 / FORMAT PS1

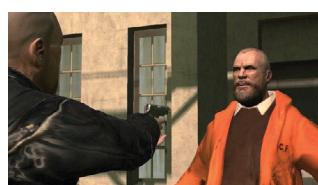
47 Even if you haven't heard the original theme for GTA, you know the beat – its melody plays every time the pager goes off in GTA III, as well as in the Commodore-64-style opening to Vice City. Titled 'Grand Theft Auto', it's credited to the fictional Da Shootaz. While far too corny to sit beside the West Coast classics in the series today, it still sounds big and baggy in true '90s fashion. "Just when I thought I knew justice, a cop behind me said: you just bin' busted."



Biking straight off Mount Chiliad

GAME GTA: SAN ANDREAS / RELEASED 2004 / FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3, PS2

49 By far the highest peak in GTA history at the time San Andreas came out, Mount Chiliad was irresistible to stunt-heads. The ramp at the very top helped, as did the knowledge that it was just about possible to land a dirt bike at the very bottom, if you were good enough. Impossible feats like this laid the groundwork for Just Cause and a whole series of silly sandbox games to follow, and ensured Rockstar would stick Chiliad in GTA V too.



Pulling a reverse prison breakout

GAME GTA IV: THE LOST AND DAMNED
RELEASED 2010 / FORMAT PS3

46 A novel twist on a crime caper classic, this counterintuitive final mission sees you blow open the doors of a correctional facility and fight through the guards in order to execute an inmate who's supposedly 'safely' behind bars. Ironically, the whole plan is an effort to get rid of a rat so that Johnny Klebitz and co can avoid being locked up themselves. Afterwards, the gang set fire to the Lost MC Clubhouse and eulogise the end of the Alderney Chapter. Aw, these bikers are sentimental.



Assembling a sniper rifle

GAME GTA: CHINATOWN WARS
RELEASED 2009 / FORMAT PSP

48 This minigame was designed to get the most out of Chinatown Wars' unique Nintendo hardware (the game was originally released on the touchscreen-equipped DS). Before using your rifle, you're required to pop open the suitcase, fasten the grip, twist the silencer, adjust the sights, slot in the ammo, and finally arm the weapon. It's a brilliantly tactile process that ramps up the tension before a mission. Firing the thing is unusual, too, since you view the map from a top-down perspective, as if shooting from the clouds.



Riding shotgun in multiplayer

GAME GTA: SAN ANDREAS / RELEASED 2004 / FORMAT PS3, PS2

45 You couldn't get much more limited than multiplayer as Rockstar first imagined it in San Andreas. Players were stuck together on the same screen, presumably for fear of breaking GTA's world-streaming system. Missions were out of the question; heists a pipe dream. Nonetheless, roaming freely and causing chaos as a duo was exciting. Not only was co-op a glimpse of the future, its tight implementation suited the fraternity feel that defined San Andreas in particular.



Flipping a car over onto its roof

GAME GTA III-V / **RELEASED** 2001-2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3, PS2

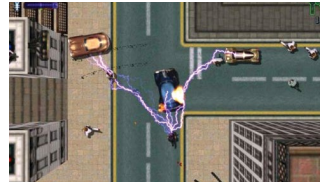
44 The driving physics that powers Rockstar's early 3D games isn't given nearly enough credit – would we have all stuck with the series for so many years if the cars hadn't been a pleasure to drive? Constantly entertaining, it lends even a boring family car a sense of buoyancy, as if the weight of the wheels is the only thing keeping the chassis from taking off. The danger is real: even GTA III's starting area, Portland Island, is a very hilly environment, and rolling your ride is inevitable. Players quickly find out what happens next, and learn to run. Ka-BOOM.



Tense showdown at the dam

GAME GTA III / **RELEASED** 2001
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS2

43 "You have been a busy boy, but you haven't learned," GTA III antagonist Catalina tells Claude. "I'm not to be trusted." And so with that inarguable truth she betrays you for the second time, walking away with the ransom money that should have secured Maria's release. The shootout that follows is a tricky one (not least because your arsenal was confiscated beforehand) and made tense by a timer. But when you pull it off, you're rewarded with a suitably explosive helicopter crash. Maria's brief epilogue is awfully misogynistic, mind.



Carefully playing the faction system

GAME GTA2 / **RELEASED** 1999
FORMAT PS1

42 GTA games have always aligned you with and against gangs, making certain districts no-go areas for a leisurely walk. But only this first sequel allowed you to influence your reputation with each group, via a point system that was updated when you completed or failed their missions. Brilliantly, rival gangs appreciated you stuffing things up for their enemies – the enemy of my enemy is my friend, after all – so you could go on a killing spree in Russian Mafia territory, and unlock a Hare Krishna job in the process. Player-driven politics.



Going dancing at The Music Locker

GAME GTA ONLINE / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

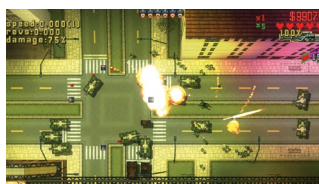
41 By the time the Cayo Perico Heist came out in December 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic had made nightclubs the stuff of myth. (Yes, we *did* occasionally venture away from our PlayStations to meet real people). Having an excuse to dress up – so as to reduce the \$150 in-game entry fee – and try out Rockstar-designed dance moves on the packed floor of The Music Locker beneath the Diamond Casino was a genuine joy, and a reminder of better times. The extraordinary light show and exclusive, motion-captured DJ sets didn't hurt.



Finding Grove Street

GAME GTA V / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

40 'Grove Street for life' was the refrain of San Andreas, and one fans repeated years later in nostalgic tribute. There was no better way to prove your lifelong devotion than to make a pilgrimage, almost a decade later, to CJ's house in GTA V. The crime-ridden cul-de-sac looks just as it did, though the Ballas occupy it now, and are keen to remind you "The Families were kicked out ages ago!" It's not just players who feel nostalgic about the place; Rockstar staged a firefight there, for old time's sake.



Facing off against the army with six stars

GAME GTA2 / **RELEASED** 1999
FORMAT PS1

39 The wanted system has always had a dual function in GTA. Both dynamic difficulty level and moral pushback, it's a reminder that actions have consequences. But it undermines the point by making those consequences fun. GTA2 was the first entry to call in the army, introducing a sixth 'star' – or angry policeman heads, as they were then – and raising the challenge to match. Armoured soldiers carried uzis and didn't attempt arrests, instead shooting to kill. Game over, man.



Niko's first kill

GAME GTA IV / **RELEASED** 2008
FORMAT PS3

38 He might be a self-described killer long before entering Liberty City, but Niko's first execution under player control feels like a momentous event. He confronts Vlad, who is sleeping with Roman's girlfriend, and gives chase, despite repeated pleas from Roman himself. "The only thing that'll hold him down is six feet of dirt," says Niko. The act itself is uncomfortable: a point-blank shot into the head of an unarmed victim. It's the death knell to the idea that here, in America, things will be different.



Modding a car with hydraulics

GAME GTA: SAN ANDREAS / **RELEASED** 2004 / **FORMAT** PS5, PS4, PS3, PS2

37 Hydraulics weren't new in San Andreas, as anybody who ever cruised the streets of Liberty City in a Yardie Lobo can tell you. But it was the third 3D game that wholeheartedly embraced car modding, and opened mod shops like the Wheel Arch Angels and Loco Low Co. Now almost any vehicle was fair game for tricked-out suspension, and players could compete in rhythm action competitions to make their cars dance. A pure celebration of lowrider culture in the US.



Doing the loop de loop in a stunt race

GAME GTA ONLINE / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

31 It's a shock when a playlist pulls you into a race from the, er, Cunning Stunts update.

Where most head-to-heads are rooted in the streets, these brightly coloured tracks are suspended high above Los Santos, and are made up of impossible strings of hamster tubes and rings of fire. Trickiest to get used to are the loops that turn you completely upside-down, forcing you to rely on the power of centripetal force to make it to the other side. The trick is to nail your angle of approach, and not think too hard about what happens afterwards.



Turning people into hot dogs

GAME GTA2 / **RELEASED** 1999
FORMAT PS1

30 One Russian Mafia mission sticks in the mind after completing GTA2. Mob leader

Jerkov needs cheap meat to feed his soldiers, and so sends you to bus stops to pick up passengers. In the PC version, Hot Dog Homicide! it's a regular bus and people; on PlayStation the mission's called RSL Bows and involves a Karma bus and Hare Krishna gangsters. Once all the seats are filled, you drive to the processing plant, where the livestock is stripped naked and funneled at gunpoint onto the conveyor belts and into the machine. They don't go quietly.



Being rock band Love Fist's roadie

GAME GTA: VICE CITY / **RELEASED** 2002
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS2

29 The road crew handles everything outside the performance when bands are on tour.

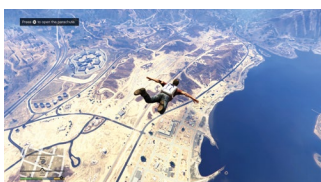
Setting up's the part you might think of, but in Tommy Vercetti's case, it means picking up a porn star, fetching 'love juice' (cocaine, boomshine, fizz bombs, petrol), and saving the group from the murderous advances of a crazed fan. Getting a chauffeur's-seat view of the antics of an '80s hair metal group is a Mötley Crüe-style treat, and Love Fist's exaggerated Scottish accents are especially funny given where Rockstar North is based.



Causing a pile-up

GAME GTA: SAN ANDREAS / **RELEASED** 2004 / **FORMAT** PS5, PS4, PS3, PS2

28 San Andreas featured GTA's first cross-country map, and with that came the necessity for highways. The near-continuous road network stretches from San Fierro to Las Venturas, and traffic moves along at a frightening pace. Thanks to a combination of unpredictable speed limit changes and cars switching lanes without warning, crashes become inevitable – leading to flipped cars, explosions, and a chain reaction of booms extending down the highway as new vehicles come to join the party. A rare disaster you're not solely responsible for.



Skydiving over Los Santos

GAME GTA V / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS3, PS4, PS5

27 GTA V's cityscape has to be seen from the air to be fully appreciated. Fortunately the game's map is littered with skydiving spots, officially introduced by obnoxious hedge fund manager and thrillseeker Dom, who pressures Franklin into stepping out of a plane. These jumps are confirmation that GTA's worlds are exciting to explore even when separated from their backdrop of crime and chaos. That said, getting to the top of the Maze Bank Tower is definitely more trouble than it's worth.



Stealing the British crown jewels

GAME GTA: LONDON 1969
RELEASED 1999 / **FORMAT** PS1

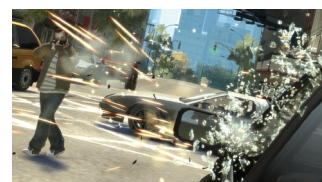
26 A Beefeater stationed outside the Tower Of London owes the mob "a couple grand, two ponies, and a monkey." After a persuasive punch to the face, he agrees to help your cockney gangster stage an audacious burglary. First, you pick up a van packed with explosives; second, you park it outside the Tower and hit the detonator. With the authorities distracted, you slip around the back and nab the 600-year-old stash of valuables, before evading the coppers. Lovely jubbly.



Surviving a high-speed FBI chase

GAME GTA: III / **RELEASED** 2001
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS2

25 Sending in the army might sound like the most extreme possible government response to a violent crime spree, but GTA III veterans know that it's the second-to-last wanted level you want to watch out for. Rather than trundle after you in tanks, the bureau brings supercharged sedans to the fight, and lays a brick on the accelerator pedal. Strongly reminiscent of the early Driver games, with their kamikaze cops and blindside collisions, these encounters are GTA III's toughest challenge.



Shooting a Rockstar dev for the trophy

GAME GTA IV / **RELEASED** 2008
FORMAT PS3

24 There are some trophies you really had to be there for. In the earliest days of GTA IV, you needed to kill a Rockstar developer in a ranked multiplayer match to win Let Sleeping Rockstars Lie – and it was quite an achievement, given how many hours the company's QA testers put into mastering PvP. But you also get it for killing a player who already has the trophy, so today, the Let Sleeping Rockstars Lie virus has spread to almost every player who frequents GTA IV online.



i **GAME** GTA III / **RELEASED** 2001 / **FORMAT** PS5, PS4, PS2

There was something special about activating cheats on PS2 in particular: while our cousins on PC were typing in comedy phrases, we were inputting arcane sequences of buttons like they were secret ciphers. We would pass a pad to a friend with a strong capacity for rote learning, and wait for the magic to happen. And, of course, this was forbidden territory – nobody activated the hidden limb-popping gore mode without a quick glance over the shoulder to check there were no parents or guardians in the room.



Salvatore's betrayal

i **GAME** GTA III / **RELEASED** 2001
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS2

20 I see nothing but good things for you, my boy. I'm proud of you, my boy. Pick up a car, my boy, take it to the crushers, and then we can finally celebrate. That's what Sal said. Only a pager message from Maria – which is easily missed if you're focused on the road – warns you about the car bombing you're walking into. It turns out that Sal wasn't too pleased with you getting together with his wife behind his back. And so you're left with no option but to turn your back on the mafia, and the Don is dead one mission later.



i **GAME** GTA V / **RELEASED** 2013 / **FORMAT** PS5, PS4, PS3

Franklin quits his dealership job in style, and Michael becomes the new player character, in a transition so smooth you barely notice it. An artful step up in comedic storytelling.



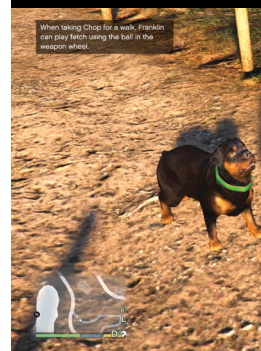
Going to the country

GAME GTA: SAN ANDREAS / **RELEASED** 2004 / **FORMAT** PS5, PS4, PS3, PS2

17 GTA had been a strictly urban proposition for seven years before San Andreas came along. Exploring Flint County, Red County, and Whetstone felt like being set free, and getting behind the wheels of tractors and combine harvesters was a breath of pungent countryside air. The new verticality made proper use of dirt bikes, and the missions changed too, The Truth introducing you to a world of survivalists and conspiracy theorists.

i **GAME** GTA (SERIES) / **RELEASED** 1997-2013 / **FORMAT** PS5, PS4, PS3, PS2, PS1, PSP

establishment: it made a life of crime look like the easiest thing in the world. The great irony of all is that 'grand theft auto' is defined under US law as stealing a car with nobody in it – so the series should've been called Carjacker all along.





“The clear gaps in each protagonist’s skillset only served to make them more distinct.”

Switching between characters

GAME GTA V / RELEASED 2013 / FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

15

The idea of three protagonists had been kicking around since San Andreas – a game composed of three cities, let’s not forget. But the daunting hardware demands only became surmountable with the appearance of PS3, and even then it was a stretch. You can feel the console creaking as GTA V’s camera zooms out, beyond the clouds, then homes in on another character, falling back to earth in irregular beats. Yet the obvious difficulty of the feat only makes it more impressive. As you watch the

street lamps shimmer over Los Santos, you can’t help marvelling at the fact this semi-seamless character swap works at all.

By 2013, it was a natural step forward in Rockstar’s storytelling, too. GTA IV’s DLC episodes, The Lost And Damned and The Ballad Of Gay Tony, had starred people on the periphery of Niko’s story, enabling the developer to explore its sandbox from different perspectives. Through Franklin, Trevor, and Michael, GTA V could be at home in the streets, desert, and Hollywood Hills respectively. For example, if a mission called for a

plane, then drug smuggler and airforce reject Mr Philips could handle it without pushing the particular abilities of Mr Clinton or Mr Townley beyond the boundaries of believability. The clear gaps in each protagonist’s skillset only served to make them more distinct.

FACE OFF

Character-swapping was also a smart modernisation in a changing open-world landscape. Since GTA IV, Ubisoft had reimagined the genre as a fairground of constant distraction, letting players warp between discovered locations to

reach the fun instantly. Evidently, Rockstar didn’t want to go down the same route – GTA’s downtime is a key part of its pacing. But switching protagonist allowed players to fast travel without breaking the flow and fiction.

The cherries on the cake are the transition scenes, which suggest your protagonists are busy getting on with their lives, and taking others, while you’re not watching. Cut to Trevor eating from a bin, burying a body, or tying up a stranger in a suit beneath the pier to demonstrate why trickle-down economics is “a load of shit”.



These antiheroes don’t sit waiting to be selected. Each time you take control, you feel like you catch them in the middle of something.



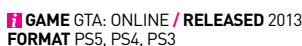
i **GAME** GTA IV / **RELEASED** 2008
FORMAT PS3

14 A classic bank heist gone wrong, pulled by Niko and a bickering family of Irish gangsters. Basically an interactive Heat, it's an intense sequence, a highlight moment in Niko's spiralling journey. It was so good we wanted more, and more was to come, as this acted as a blueprint for GTA V's main campaign and online heists.



GAME GTA ONLINE / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

12 Designed to be highly replayable and malleable, so that you still had options for clean escapes if the plan went sideways, this was a new kind of heist from Rockstar where no two executions feel quite the same (especially if you hop in with a different gang). Security has never been tighter, which makes this quite the challenge, and oh—so-satisfying when a plan comes together.



13 Crowd control has rarely been so literal in games. Keeping the hostages in check, the mission is reminiscent of GTA V's opening except everything, and we mean *everything*, is down to you and your online partners in crime. Trying to nail it without killing anyone, to avoid bringing the SWAT-like NOOSE down around your necks, is tricky work.



GAME GTA: ONLINE / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

11 Plays on the silliness of '60s Bond to give you access to personal jetpacks and underwater cars, even if the villain is somewhat lacking in cats. Oh, you didn't realise there was a secret base under Mount Chiliad? You and your ne'er-do-well pals 'do well' for once – this is world-saving stuff – but play your cards right and it can be quite lucrative nevertheless, as well as a thrilling adventure.

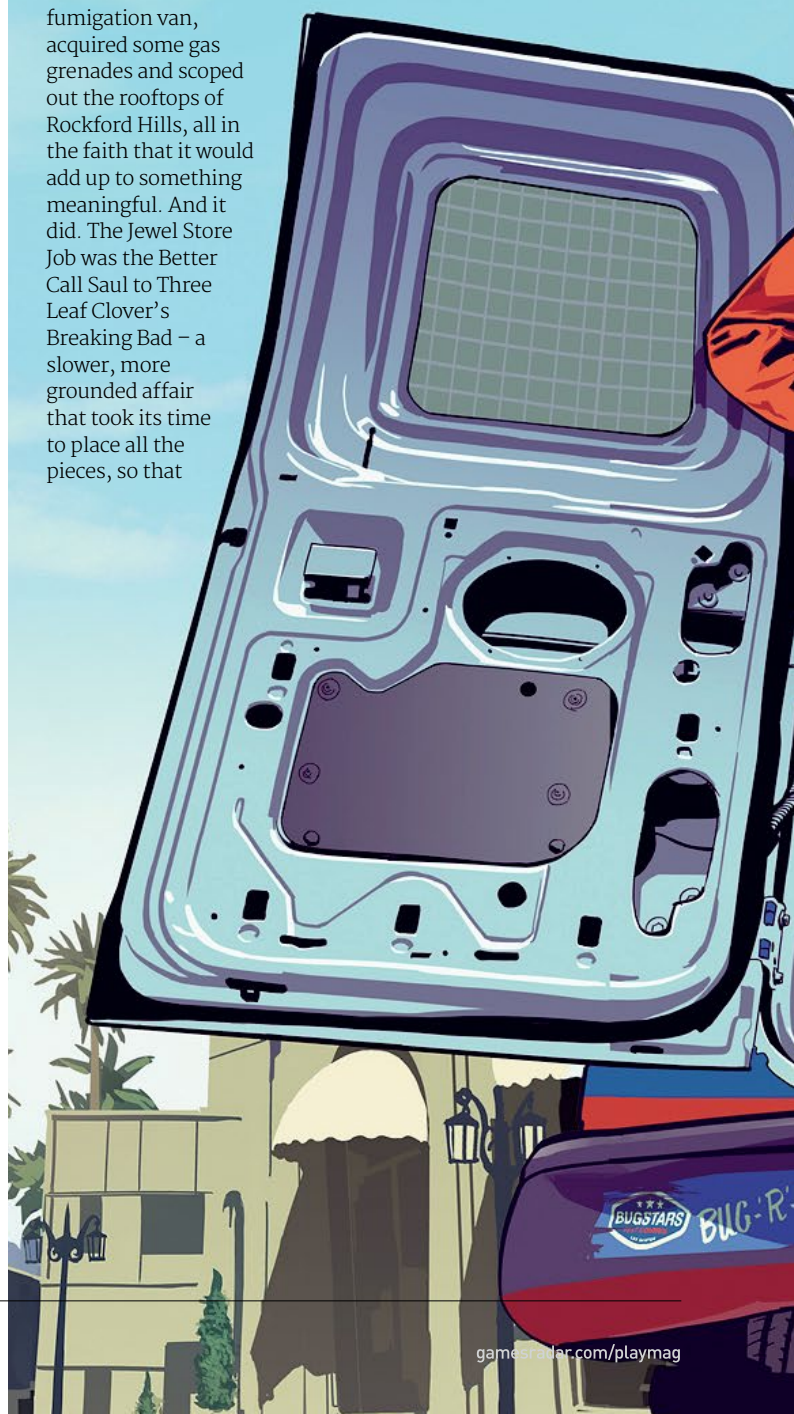
i **GAME** GTA V / **RELEASED** 2013 / **FORMAT** PS5, PS4, PS3

10 The genius of GTA V's early game-changing heist was its focus on procedure: the step-by-step preparations you took to secure all the instruments, so that they could be played together in one final, symphonic show.

Setup missions are a concept familiar to GTA Online players now, of course, but in 2013 they were a step into the unknown. You nicked a fumigation van, acquired some gas grenades and scoped out the rooftops of Rockford Hills, all in the faith that it would add up to something meaningful. And it did. The Jewel Store Job was the Better Call Saul to Three Leaf Clover's Breaking Bad – a slower, more grounded affair that took its time to place all the pieces, so that

the eventual payoff could be even more explosive.

Your conductor was Lester, a criminal mastermind able to direct your felonious abilities like never before in the series. For once you felt like you were part of something: an operation that would be smart, efficient, and effective, if only you could pick the right participants. The heist presented you with a new risk-reward equation: you could hypothetically save



money by hiring inexperienced goons, and bag the largest possible score for yourself. Could you trust an untested gunman, Norm, to hold up the store manager and ride a bike through the sewer tunnels without losing his head? Would any of that matter if you stumped up for a skilled hacker, allowing you to clear the joint without the alarms going off? The possible deviations were dizzying, and yet Rockstar still managed to make The Jewel Store Job feel like scripted cinema. It's just like a film you'll want to let run

again, to see how it might have gone differently.

You can argue that much of this potential was ultimately wasted in GTA V; opportunities to call on your crew later in the campaign were limited, and subsequent heists offered fewer options for your approach. It took years of GTA Online for Rockstar to build on the foundations laid down here. But for the sheer shock of new choice and consequence, you simply can't beat Franklin's first time.

Great plans require having great moving pieces, which is where GTA V's character switching plays to its strengths.

“Smart, efficient and effective, if only you could pick the right participants.”



GAME GTA: VICE CITY / **RELEASED** 2002
FORMAT PS5 PS4 PS2

i GAME GTA III / **RELEASED** 2001
FORMAT PS5 PS4 PS2

A screenshot from the game 'Army Base' showing a top-down view of a military base. The base is divided into several sections by roads and barriers. In the center, there is a large, dark, rectangular structure, possibly a hangar or a command center. To the left, there are several smaller buildings and a large, dark, rectangular structure. To the right, there are more buildings and a large, dark, rectangular structure. The base is surrounded by a green field. In the top left corner, there is a small map showing the base's layout. In the top right corner, there is a score of 177,000 and a timer of 1:00. In the bottom left corner, there is a small icon of a tank. In the bottom right corner, there is a small icon of a helicopter.

i **GAME** GTA2 / **RELEASED** 1999
FORMAT PS1

i GAME GTA III / **RELEASED** 2001
FORMAT PS5 PS4 PS2

GAME GTA: VICE CITY / **RELEASED** 2002
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS2

i GAME GTA V / **RELEASED** 2013
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS3

i **GAME** GRAND THEFT AUTO
RELEASED 1997 / **FORMAT** PS1

i GAME GTA: VICE CITY / **RELEASED** 2002
FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS2



GTA III's opening area felt big for the time, so imagine our collective gasps when we realised how huge Liberty City really was.



Crossing the Callahan Bridge

GAME GTA III / RELEASED 2001 / FORMAT PS5, PS4, PS2

01

In Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, an inventor builds a machine capable of showing the

entire scope of the universe, and the position of the user within it. Named the Total Perspective Vortex, it becomes a torture device, as it turns out in such a vast place, the one thing we can't afford to have is a sense of perspective.

Rockstar must have realised something similar while putting together GTA III. It knew we couldn't handle Liberty City whole. Exposing a 2001 gamer to a full-scale urban open world would probably have fried their frontal lobe, and so the game

was divided into three islands, each linked to the next by a bridge. Then the first of those, the Callahan Bridge, was ripped apart by a bomb at the start of the game, leaving you stranded in Portland, a pastiche of New York's industrial districts.

There you remained, for hours, learning the layout of the red light district, and the locations of police cars and health icons. The coastal drive up to Salvatore's mansion started to feel like home. Then plot

"While putting together GTA III, Rockstar knew we couldn't handle Liberty City whole."

machinations took you away from the Italian mafia, and across the water to Staunton, first by boat, and then via the suspension bridge.

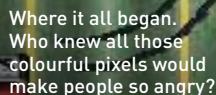
Staunton Island itself was overwhelming, a glamorous land of

stretched limos and high-rise buildings. The roads were wider, the drives were longer, and the skyline was roughly recognisable as that of Manhattan. Navigating this multi-lane world was bewildering, and you could understand why Rockstar hadn't simply let you loose there in the first place.

For years, impatient players shared methods of crossing the Callahan without completing missions, jumping between the bridge's warped cables over water that, to a protagonist who couldn't swim, was deadly. Some made it, and were treated to a forbidden realm.

Today 3D open worlds are standard fare. But in the years after crossing the Callahan Bridge, we called them 'GTA clones' – an acknowledgement that Rockstar had achieved something new.

While we look forward to **GTA VI**, Luke Kemp takes us through the history of the series to remind us of everything we've seen so far



GTA2's city was "Anywhere, USA", and featured a retrofuturistic style. It wasn't used again.

The beginning of the series: PS1, 1997-1999

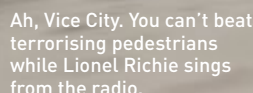
GAMES RELEASED GRAND THEFT AUTO, GTA: LONDON 1969, GTA2

This top-down crime-'em-up was spread across three locations: Liberty City; Vice City; and San Andreas. Yup, all three have been GTA canon from the beginning. You may not be surprised to learn that the series, and its reliance on crime and violence, caused controversy from the very beginning. There was

1999 saw the release of two new games. Grand Theft Auto: London 1969 was an expansion pack developed by Rockstar Canada, and was set in – you guessed it – London. Over here, the expansion got a bigger, standalone release (but you can't guess why). You could tell that it was set in the UK, because when you were arrested, the screen would shout NICKED at you instead

The fully fledged sequel was released in the same year as the cockney-flavoured expansion pack for the first game. GTA2 introduced many things that carried through to the rest of the series in one way or another, such as a health bar, manual saving, side-missions, vehicle modding, and – for better or for worse – a large number of things to collect hidden throughout the city. A solid foundation for future games to build on.





The PS2 games and series evolution: 2001-2004

The protagonist causing havoc in Liberty City was mute, but the NPCs weren't. The fully-voiced story boasted high-profile actors in the cast, including Kyle MacLachlan and Michael Madsen. It must've been costly to develop, but it paid off; GTA III was the best-selling game of the year.

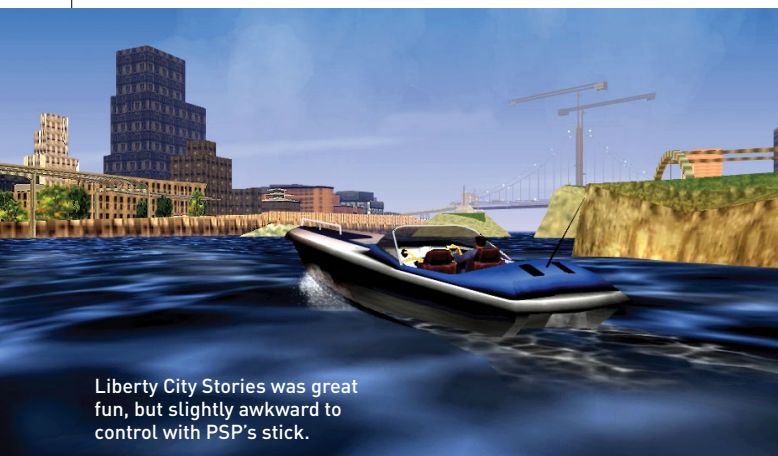
“San Andreas was much bigger than anything that had come before.”

soundtrack and neon-happy visual design practically *screamed* 1980s at players. Another all-star cast certainly didn't hurt, with actors including Gary Busey, Dennis Hopper... and the late Ray Liotta as Tommy Vercetti.

In 2004 came the big one (literally); in terms of map size, San Andreas was much bigger than anything that had come before, over twice as big as Liberty City and Vice City put together. Despite this, there were – unlike in the previous two games – no loading screens while exploring the open world. Some still treasure it as the best GTA, and it was certainly met with a warm welcome on release. As is tradition for the series by now, it outsold all other games that year. It introduced stealth, hopping over walls, and the ability to swim. It was the first game in the series to feature character customisation via haircuts and the like, and RPG-style skill improvement.



GTA: THE ULTIMATE COMPANION



Liberty City Stories was great fun, but slightly awkward to control with PSP's stick.



Don't do it, Niko! Or do. It's one of the first choices in the game.

Time to pocket the profits

GTA games on the go: 2005-2009

GAMES RELEASED GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES, GTA: VICE CITY STORIES, GTA: CHINATOWN WARS

The GTA spin-off Liberty City Stories was released as a PSP exclusive in 2005. It was ported to PS2 in 2006, but the latter version was actually *missing* some really cool features from the original handheld release, namely the multiplayer mode and the ability to create custom soundtracks from your own music. (Now *that's* something we wish the series still had.)

2006 then saw Vice City Stories for PSP (also later ported to PS2). Although the Stories games and their recycled maps were filling a gap before the next 'proper' GTA, they were still pretty good, and retained some of the stars of the games that they drew from.

Chinatown Wars (2009) never made the jump from PSP to PS2, which is a shame, because it's absolutely brilliant. Using a similar top-down view to the original games, it had a retro feel while being a much sharper experience than those 1990s titles.



Relax at the Niko cafe

GTA IV and its expansions: 2008-2010

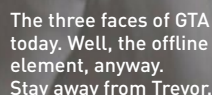
GAMES RELEASED GTA IV, THE LOST AND DAMNED, THE BALLAD OF GAY TONY

As the first GTA designed from the ground up for a new generation of consoles, GTA IV wowed the industry when it launched for PS3 in 2008.

Liberty City looked better than ever, and the game featured a number of improvements and features that would return in the next entry in the series. These include the importance and functions of your phone, TV programmes that you can watch in the protagonist's home, the ability to make decisions at certain points during the story, and (a small but very neat thing) the ability to hail a cab and just sit in the back, enjoying the ride.

Two expansions, The Lost And Damned and The Ballad Of Gay Tony, were released individually for Xbox 360 in 2009, but in a single standalone package for PS3 in 2010. The Lost And Damned gained notoriety for briefly showing a man's 'unholstered pistol' (*ahem*) in a cutscene.





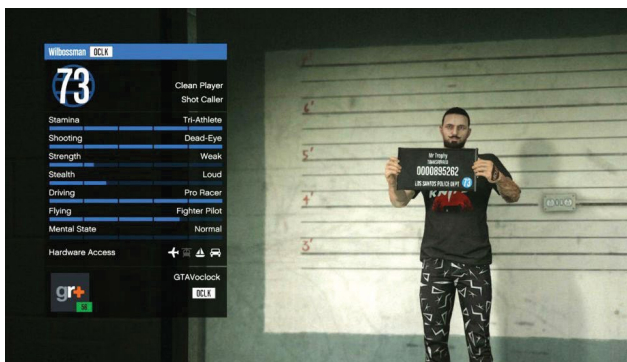
GTA as it is today: 2013-present

Is Rockstar's dedication to GTA Online updates a sign of how important online features will be to the next game? Even if it's not, each instalment has offered something new, and there's no reason to think GTA VI will be any different.





Learn how to get started in **GTA Online's** latest version with Don Iain Wilson's beginner's FAQ. Need to go deeper? Find more guides on our sister site: gamesradar.com/gta-online-guide



Q What lifestyle options should I choose in the character creator?

A When you start, the first thing you're presented with is the character creator, where you can choose lifestyle options like how many hours a day you spend sleeping or partying. These alter your stats and to an extent your appearance, but the effect is minimal. Instead, focus on the

appearance section of the character creator – you’re going to spend a lot of time looking at your avatar, and once your overall look is locked in it can be expensive to make further changes. You’ll also be able to try the GTA Online Career Builder, which will help you get a head start in terms of cash.



Q Can you simply skip the GTA Online tutorial?

A Yes, but you probably shouldn't, first for the obvious reason – it's an invaluable introduction to the mechanics of the online world. Franklin's best friend Lamar Davies will pick you up and guide you through the basics, including races, missions, shopping, and robberies, as well as

introducing you to several other handy contacts.

And if that hasn't persuaded you, note that it's to your benefit to complete the tutorial: in the past, some players have mentioned experiencing issues with receiving missions to complete if they decide to skip it.



Q What should I do next?

A Once you've completed the tutorial, the world opens up entirely for you to explore. It's all out there, and working out where to begin can feel daunting. A good activity to get started is stealing vehicles and either delivering them to Simeon if they're on the wish list he sends you, or taking them to

a Los Santos Customs – it'll help you find your way around, and it's not especially complicated either. If you're looking for more structure, a job list on your phone (accessed via the D-pad) helps you quickly jump into activities which also flesh out the story and world.

GTA: THE ULTIMATE COMPANION



Q I'm here for the cars and crime – do I need to buy a property?

A Yes, to get the most out of GTA Online. Garages allow you to store vehicles for personal use, so it's worth picking one up as soon as you can afford it. Dynasty 9 Real Estate on your phone will help you find properties. When you have a bit more money available you should invest in a high-end apartment, as these not only provide a base of operations and somewhere to change your clothing, but also have attached garages for more

vehicle storage and a planning room where you can prepare Heists.

Then there are business properties, which can open up whole new streams of missions to complete, complete with storylines. The most recent GTA Online update makes it much easier to get started with these from the moment you create your antihero, but they still require a lot of time and cash, so it's not the first thing you need to worry about.



Q How do I replenish my health, armour, and ammunition?

A The good news is you can stuff food items into your pockets as well as eat at restaurants to restore health. Armour works the same way, available from

AmmuNation, where you can buy ammunition too. However, for a small extra fee you can also buy ammo right from the inventory. Useful in a pinch.

“You can stuff food items into your pockets as well as eat at restaurants to restore health.”



Q How do I stop other players griefing me?

A There are lots of friendly players out there, but some people just want to watch the world burn. This can be particularly frustrating if you just want to explore and another player follows you constantly to give you grief.

If you open the Interaction menu using the

touchpad and scroll to the bottom, you can enable Passive mode. This will stop any other players from interacting with you, though you won't be able to equip any weapons or use melee attacks. You can also vote to kick them in the Players menu, hop into a job, or click 'Find A New Session'.



Q What's the best way to make money and level up fast?

As you might expect, plenty of missions aren't exactly beginner-friendly, and so a lot of the cool missions and weapons in GTA Online aren't available until you reach a certain rank. You increase your rank by earning Reputation (RP) for completing tasks in the game. You'll also make

money for carrying out tasks. You'll need it, as little in GTA Online is free. Shark Cards are in-game cash cards that deposit in-game currency in your characters bank account, but you'll have to part with real-world money for them – better to grit your teeth and carry out missions, we reckon.

Five reasons GTA Online's **Criminal Enterprises** changes the game

From long-awaited quality-of-life updates to brand-new missions, here are the reasons why Criminal Enterprises makes now the perfect time to jump into GTA Online...

01

This simplifies how to progress your businesses, and means you can complete Sell missions and other activities without having to worry about outside influence. Love the thrill of danger, though? That's being rewarded, with doing so in Public sessions now offering increased bonuses. It's win-win.



Going public isn't the only path forward. Now you can play your cards a little closer to your chest.



Improved quick actions mean less fiddling, more blasting

Now a mission and your resources are now reset to how they were when you retry. Other quality-of-life tweaks introduced include the ability to top up all weapons' ammo at once, run inside the Diamond Casino, and a nerf to the Oppressor Mark II flying motorcycle, previously the pride of griefers server-wide.

Show me the money

Loosening the purse strings to grow bigger, faster

03

What if you could make more money at no extra cost? That's what this update has done across most of the board, offering

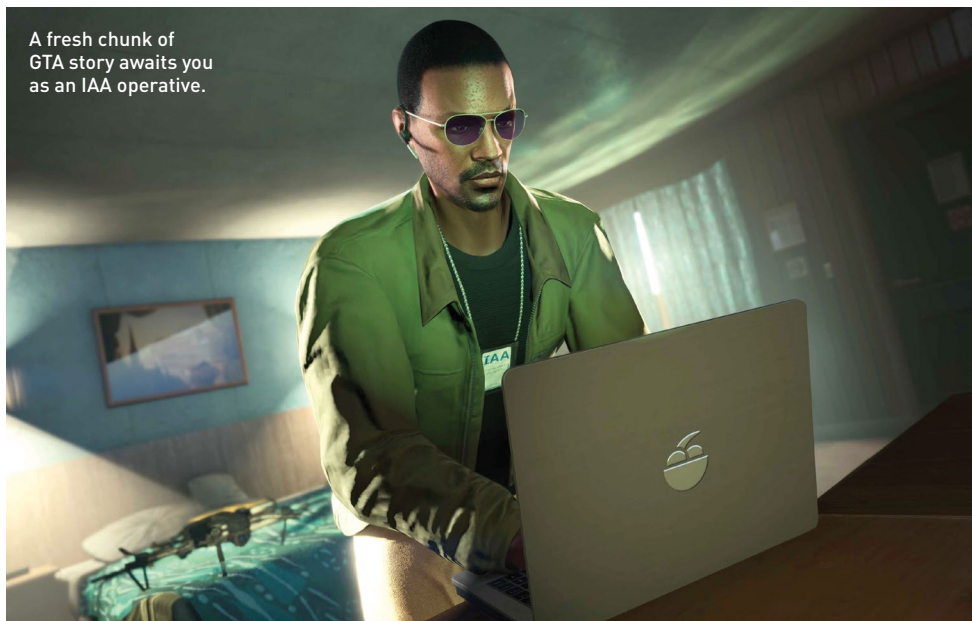
50% increases to GTA\$ earned through the likes of races and Adversary modes (on average).

Meanwhile, the payouts for Heists, one of the best ways to earn money at present, have been boosted between 50% and 75%. Earning more cash at a faster rate means less worrying about your finances, and more having fun as you grow your influence in Los Santos.



Apologies to Notorious B.I.G., but more money means fewer problems.

A fresh chunk of GTA story awaits you as an IAA operative.



Agent under fire

Sign up with the IAA to take on Contact missions

04

GTA has never been subtle about the blurred line that separates those on either side of the law, meaning the

opportunity to join the IAA as a field operative isn't completely left-field, if an exciting novelty.

Contact missions have you pulling off jobs on the IAA's behalf, centring on a gas-price-rigging criminal conspiracy as part of Operation Paper Trail. Just answer Agent ULP's call when he phones you, and you'll get a map marker showing you exactly where to get started.

Revving up

More new rides, all the time

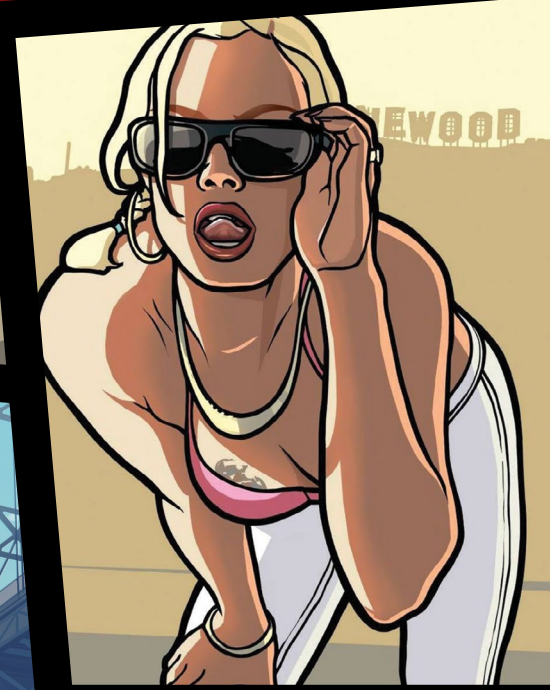
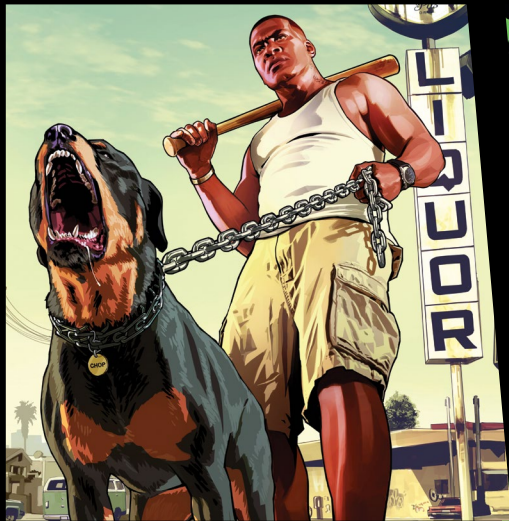
05

The vehicles introduced with this update aren't just nice new rides, they're a commitment to GTA Online's future, with more teased through summer and beyond (two of which can be customised at the Agency, and one from Hao that's unavailable on PS4 because it's too powerful).

Five in total are part of the Criminal Enterprises – the Corsita, Greenwood, LM87, Torero XO, and Omnis e-GT, plus there's a Conada helicopter for good measure. 12 more are due to arrive. Time to scoop up some more garage space?



The game might be called Grand Theft Auto, but you can buy and store these like a good owner.



PLAY Presents: GTA: The Ultimate Companion

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